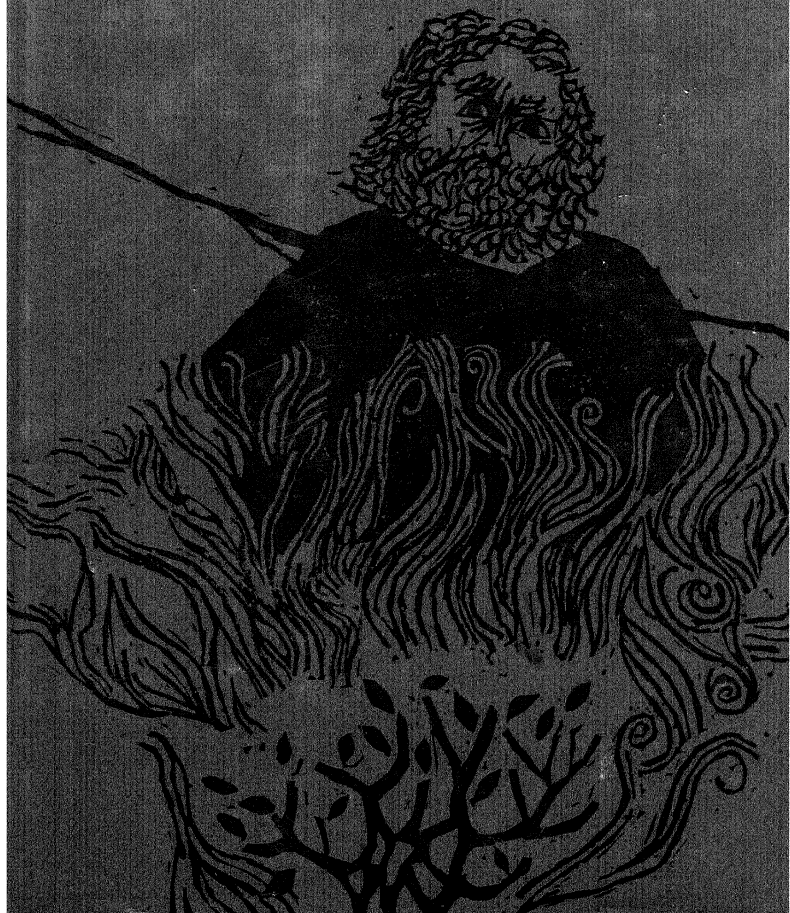


# AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN:

STORIES FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

DOROTHY M. SLUSSER



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STORIES FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

DOROTHY M. SLUSSER

There are two ways to interpret the arts, law, and religion, and hardly anyone has not at some time or other been repelled, bewildered, or discouraged by the interpretation that values technicalities above spirit. In this sublimely "untechnical" book the story of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage is told, not in light of the latest findings in Biblical archaeology and scholarship, but according to the spiritual truth as an ancient people saw it of their own relationship to a living God — a truth to be found eternally aglow under all assessment of the historical experience. Author of a kindred book on Genesis (see back of jacket), Mrs. Slusser brings to these narratives from Exodus and Numbers the brilliance of insight that so distinguished the earlier work, the same depth and variety of allusion, the writing verve, and the stinging application to the modern scene. Both books make every reader want to run, not walk, to the nearest Bible, prodding even seasoned students of it to feel they've been missing the most vital meanings all along.

From its beginning with the event of the burning bush to its climax in the crossing of the Jordan, the story of the exodus shows over and over God's use of ordinary men to carry out his love for mankind, shows his great patience with the stubborn self-will and repeated waywardness of those he calls to be his children. Only, the crossing of the Jordan does not end the story. Exodus — deliverance from the past to openness for the future —

*(Continued on back flap)*

Jacket illustration by Eileen Tabor



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### *At the Foot of the Mountain*



*Books by*  
DOROTHY M. SLUSSER  
*Published by The Westminster Press*

At the Foot of the Mountain:  
*Stories from the Book of Exodus*  
Bible Stories Retold for Adults

*At the Foot  
of the  
Mountain*

STORIES FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

*by*

DOROTHY M. SLUSSER

THE WESTMINSTER PRESS  
*Philadelphia*

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD No. 61-5397

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO PEGGY



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## *Introduction*

The sheer length of the Bible appears forbidding to one just beginning the journey through its pages, but I have always been impressed with its economy of words, quite unlike the current trend in literature that literally talks its readers to death with a welter of disconnected phrases captured from the thought stream. Marcel Proust required thirty pages to describe to his readers the gyrations, threshings, and milling thoughts of a man going to sleep in his bed. By contrast, the Bible speaks a short sentence in I Kings 4:25, saying, "Judah and Israel dwelt in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon," and with those few words describes a long period in the history of Israel.

We have no alternative but to pay tedious attention to the most minuscule details of a man going to sleep when we must read about it for thirty pages, but we pass over the short sentence in the Bible, unable to paint a picture around it. The Hebrew to whose experience the words were spoken could, however, through his own tradition, impart to the bare words a depth of meaning possible only to those whose language and ceremony of life were the background and origin of the written word. The Hebrew has been told in this one sentence that the time of the reign of Solomon was a time of happiness, prosperity, peace, and security, for a man sitting under his own vine and fig tree was the picture of peace and plenty. All the glories of Solomon's reign are recalled to the mind able to read the meaning inherent in these verbal symbols.

It would be practically impossible for one unfamiliar with the language spoken in the gestures and movements of a classical ballet dancer to interpret the meaning of the dance, simply by observing it. Each gesture, each turn of the head or placing of the foot, is a picture that is worth a thousand words to one who understands the language of the dance. The strange, contracted jargon printed on the ticker tapes that flow like sensuous noodles from the noisy little machines in the offices climbing the shadowy cliffs of Wall Street may make no sense when read by you or me, but their very form and continuity may recall an entire history of finance to one whose experience spans several decades of financial activity.

Our language reflects the philosophy of our entire culture. Though we may be completely unaware of it, our verbal symbols reveal the value structure of our society. When we, the heirs of our stern Puritan ancestors, discipline our children, we say, "Be good, Tommy!" But a Hopi Indian would say, "That is not our way, Tommy," while the French would say, "Be wise, Tommy." On the other hand, the German parent would say, "Get in step, Tommy!" If we told Tommy to get in step, he would probably wonder where the drums were, but little German Tommy knows very well he is being warned to get out of the jam pot. Thus our own peculiar history and background impose themselves on all our reading, sometimes hindering our understanding, and leaving us very often with a false impression of what we have read. In order to understand what the Hopi Indian or the German housewives mean when they say simple, everyday words of discipline to their children, we must somehow translate, not only their language to our language, but their culture to our culture.

We must transcend our own cultural understanding and seek to comprehend the cultural history and pattern of an entirely different people, if we would understand their language. When we are concerned with understanding the Bible, we must realize that the Hebrew writer was not endeavoring to produce historical literature, accurate in factual knowledge and chronological sequence—goals that were neither problematic nor natural to

the Hebrew mind. The Hebrew was interested in producing the story of the truth about his relationship to God, and his concern takes him down strange and mysterious paths for the mind of Western man, whose understanding is often hampered by his definition of truth.

In addition to philosophical problems confronting us when we read the Bible, we must also seek an understanding of literary forms, cultural mores, geographical advantages and encumbrances. Sometimes we are given only the barest shreds of a story, imparting on the surface mere geographical movement or consecutive historical incidents, yet the same words spoken into the ear of a waiting and expectant people are enough to alter their entire way of life.

It is to the task of finding the meaning in the stories preserved for us in the account of the Exodus that I have turned my pen, believing that the life the Bible promises is a pearl of rare price intended for all mankind. I have endeavored to reduce the vernacular of Hebrew experience to the vernacular of our own daily experience, in order to reach the message of love and the gift of freedom proclaimed in the Bible. As in my previous book on Genesis, I have not attempted to deal with the chronological or historical difficulties inherent in the material, nor is the book a substitute for a knowledge of the Bible itself.

No doubt most readers will share my conviction that, considering the vast amount of material that has been written about the exodus, there can scarcely be anything new that I can add to it. On the other hand, much of that which has been written has been concerned chiefly with problems of text, chronology, and history. Generally speaking, the invaluable work of the Biblical scholars leaves the layman wandering in a bewildering maze, and is little help as he tries to find answers for his life in the book he believes is capable of producing those answers. The real concern of the layman is to discover the meaning of the relationships in the Bible, within Israel, between Israel and her neighbors, and between Israel and God. It is these relationships with which we will be concerned, and with an understanding of their significance

and relevance for our daily lives.

The story of the exodus begins in a most unpromising fashion with a fugitive from justice, and we must at the outset accustom ourselves to the honesty of the Biblical writers. Moses, having been saved from the death decree for Hebrew sons by the Pharaoh's daughter and reared in Pharaoh's court, as a young man killed an Egyptian, whom he discovered mistreating a Hebrew slave. He was forced to flee Egypt because his deed had been witnessed, and Pharaoh sought his life.

Moses' arrival in Midian reminds us of Jacob's arrival in Haran. Both Jacob and Moses were seeking refuge from their own past. Moses, like Jacob, arrived at a well. When the seven daughters of Jethro came to draw water for their father's flocks, Moses protected them from the rough herdsman who tried to force them from the well. His chivalry won him one of the sisters for a wife. Unlike Jacob, Moses appears to have won and received the woman of his choice, and his relationship with his father-in-law was one of lifelong respect and affection.

His stay in Midian stretched out as year followed year, until forty years had slipped away. This might have been the "and they lived happily ever after" ending to a romantic story had not God interrupted the life of the contented son-in-law. The story that follows was ever after considered the focal point in the history of Israel, and its implications for our lives are limitless, for the call to Israel from God to become his children is the same call God makes to us.

D. M. S.

## I

# *The Reluctant Knight*

(Ex., chs. 3; 4)

When Moses had fled Egypt, the condition of the Israelites was a sorry one. Their fruitful multiplication created such a problem for Egypt that the king was forced to acknowledge, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us" (Ex. 1:9). Determined that Egypt should not be deprived of their economic value should the strength of their number induce them to fight for freedom, the king initiated a policy of oppression against them, hoping to stem their fruitfulness and break their spirit.

The Israelites became subject to labor conscription and were forced into ambitious building projects for the nation. They became the downtrodden victims of hard labor and oppressive treatment, which resulted not, as Pharaoh had planned, in a diminution of the people or their vigor, but actually in an increase of their number and potential power. "And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel." (Ex. 1:12.) The Egyptians increased the hardships of the Israelites, but what the king of Egypt did not know was that he was fighting not the Israelites alone, a nation of slaves, but had declared war also on the God of Israel, fulfiller of promise. As the Hebrews increased and filled up the land, the Egyptians instigated ever more stringent measures, hoping to curb this flood of people which threatened the very security of the state. It must have been a thoroughly frustrating experience, considering how unsuccessful it was.

During Moses' long exile from the land of his birth, the king from whose wrath he had fled died. The burden of the Hebrews

was not thereby lessened. Perhaps Moses had been able, however, to still his own memory of the condition of his people whom he had left as slaves to the Egyptians. In view of his experience when he had attempted to intervene in their behalf, he had surely reached the conclusion that he was helpless to do anything about their condition. The cry of the oppressed Israelites rose up until it reverberated against the gates of heaven. According to the writer in the book of Exodus, their cry was not directed to God, but being of sufficient volume, it reached him anyway. They had, perhaps, come to feel that God was no longer concerned for them or active in their behalf. After all, his promise to the fathers had been made a long time before and in another land. It is possible, though we are not told so, that they had come to regard the gods of the Egyptians as more powerful, particularly since they appeared to prevail. The belief that gods were identified with and active only within a limited geographic location was common among ancient peoples.

There is a gentle, ironic story by Franz Kafka called *The Great Wall of China* which is reminiscent of this story in the Bible. Kafka tells of the tremendous architectural feat of building a wall around China, which was to protect it from its enemies to the north. The plan was a strange one, involving piecemeal construction by the work crews, two of which would be ordered to build a five-hundred-yard section each, meeting at the middle. But then, instead of building adjacent adjoining sections, the crews would be transferred to an entirely different place, which plan left large gaps between the constructed sections of the wall.

The people of the narrator's tiny village are so far removed from the government in Peking and their beloved emperor, that for all practical purposes their emperor might not even exist. News travels slowly and is of doubtful authenticity, usually obsolete by the time it reaches them. By being transferred from one section of the project to another, the men can be given a glimpse of the anticipated reality of the whole of the wall.

Peking, their capital, is so far away they can scarcely imagine such a place actually exists. It has little to do with their ordinary

lives, and their concept of the emperor is vaporous, indistinct, and archaic. Israel's relationship to God appears to have had the same lack of contemporary vitality. God, however, knew the condition of his people, having never forsaken them, and the time was right for intervention in their behalf.

His chosen instrument went about his daily tasks, unaware of his impending conscription as liberator. One day, while Moses was out caring for the sheep of his father-in-law, his long, contented exile was brought to an end. The bright flame of God's presence appeared in the midst of a bush near the path where Moses walked. The flame burned with a consuming brilliance, yet the bush that sheltered it was not itself consumed. Moses, curious about a fire that burned but did not consume, turned aside to see how this could be so. He was quickly distracted from the line of his inquiry when he heard the sound of his own name rise up out of the depths of the flame: "Moses, Moses!" In a perfectly natural manner, lacking a sophistication of doubt concerning the awesome phenomenon before him, Moses answered very simply, "Here am I" (Ex. 3:4).

His approach to the vicinity of the flame was halted, and he was told to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. The source of the living flame revealed itself to Moses as the God of his father, and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Because he was afraid to look at God, Moses hid his face. The occasion for God's encounter with him on the mountainside was revealed to him. God recalled to Moses the condition of his fellow men whom he had left in Egypt so long before. Moses had escaped enslavement, but Israel was crying under its bondage. The deliverance of these slaves, who made up God's chosen instrument of redemption for the world, was the reason for God's speaking to Moses. God called him to be the agent of the deliverance of Israel.

The commission was one of overwhelming gravity for Moses. Remembrance of the terrible plight of his people, and of his own impotence to intercede for them once before, came back sharply to him, not to mention the sting of renunciation by one of his own

people which had in the first place precipitated his flight from Egypt. All these memories flooded into his mind. He had fled Egypt in terror, preserving the safety of his own life, and now he could only say, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11), but God ignored the question Moses put to him.

What answer did Moses expect? Perhaps he expected to hear a glowing account of his own past deeds, which, accumulating in the annals of heaven, had finally qualified him as the man best suited for such a task as was laid before him. Or maybe he wished to be assured that he would be transformed by some magic into a person unable to fail as a popular hero of the people and a dauntless foe of Pharaoh. God's answer must have been a disappointment to him, even as we are disappointed when we expect God to ensure for us the successful outcome of each task we undertake for the sake of the God of love in whom we profess to believe. We seek a magic pill, consisting of six parts flattery and four parts "assured success," which will transform us into automatic Galahads. "Who am I?" we ask, excusing ourselves under the guise of modesty. Well, I am that one, with all others, who has been accepted by God as worthy of his love. God doesn't wait to find a ready-made hero, nor does he remove man's humanity with magic transformations, when he seeks to find one to carry out his love for mankind. He calls an ordinary man for the task, and tells him, as he told Moses, "But I will be with you" (Ex. 3:12). Forgetfulness of self and reliance on the strength of God's presence are enough to accomplish the task, we are answered by God, even the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt.

Lest Moses still demur, God continued, "And this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: When you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain" (Ex. 3:12). What kind of assurance is this? A future event would be the security for a present task? Now, really! It is as if God came to me and said: "Some of my beloved people are being oppressed under terrible conditions of slavery in South Africa. You go and bring to freedom the Bantus and Zulus, liberating

them from the bondage of apartheid, and when you have accomplished the task and brought them here, your worshipping me here together will be an omen assuring you that you have done that which I have commanded you."

How can the unhappened future secure the troubled present? If God cannot absolutely secure my present, how can I be expected to go on doing that which in love of others and heedlessness of self I see must be done in his name? Shall I never possess his presence, without doubt or question? Must I always plunge forward, acting in faith that he is with me? Is his assurance, his grace, always to be in the future, just out of reach? But then I wish, as men have always, to be where God is. Nevertheless, when I go forward, openly embracing the approaching future, he is there, when I accept that future as part of the awesome gift of life which he has apportioned me.

Moses echoed our own sentiments when he continued to argue with God about the unlikelihood of the future to which he was being called. He seemingly felt himself the most implausible person for the task at hand. Moses is certainly a hero with whom we can identify. We find in him familiar elements of humanness—reticence, shyness, kindness, weakness, strength. He had fled the terror of his past in fear, even as each of us has at some time fled from the past in fear. He sought to side-step the uncertainty of the future. We say with him, "Who am I?" Here is a man no different from us, wanting simply to be left alone with his docile, comfortable sheep, tending to his own business.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." (Ex. 3:13-15.)

Calling on God's name was a practice which had fallen into disuse with the Israelites, and his proper designation assumes a position of central importance in Moses' call. As with the Chinese villagers of Kafka's story, the Israelites worshiped a God whose vitality in the life of the people lay in the past, in the remote history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the same sense of having completely lost the presence of a living, contemporary God, Friedrich Nietzsche, just about a century ago, declared to a disillusioned Western scientific world that God was dead. Even those of us who continue resolutely worshiping before a pedestal of seemingly still ashes feel the words lying like cold chips of death at the bottom of our hearts, and we wonder if he has not spoken the truth. And, of course, he has, effectively. The God of the past was only a shadowy memory falling across the nineteenth century. Man was beginning to move, and was soon to outdistance his own almost insurmountable ego and its wildest dreams by his own capabilities, but God was left behind, an archaic, twelfth-century mummy. The spiritual rebirth of the Reformation had succumbed to the dead dogma of the seventeenth-century Scholastics. "God" had become a semantic symbol, unable to participate in modern philosophy because the meaning in the symbol belonged to another age.

God's answer to Moses involves more than simply the designation of his proper name. Martin Buber states in his book *Moses, The Revelation and the Covenant* that the word "what" is never used in the Hebrew language in conjunction with someone's name. The Hebrew would say, "Who are you?" or, "Who is your name?" and here Moses has really asked the nature of God behind his name, and not merely a title to pass on to his fellow Hebrews. On the basis of his question, Moses was given the correct answer by God. The Hebrews, as most ancient people, believed that the character of a person was revealed in his name. God answered Moses with what, in every sense of the word, was an enigma, specifically untranslatable, or, more accurately speaking, multi-translatable. God said, in words to breathe his presence back into the life of a people whose knowledge of him had some-

how come to be only a nebulous memory, "I AM WHO I AM," or read another way, "I WILL BE THAT I WILL BE," or, "I AM HE WHO CAUSES TO EXIST WHAT COMES INTO EXISTENCE."

By answering Moses in a verb form, God called the past, present, and future his. We must, in passing, call our understanding of the verb "to be" into question. In English we usually have reference to a static state when we use the verb "to be." Actually, we would have a more accurate understanding of the term if we substituted "becoming," a term that is not static, but dynamic, pointing to the future. Perhaps, then, the best translation for us would be, "I SHALL BE WHAT I SHALL BE." God is the creative future — the source of all that is to become. In addition, God told Moses to recall his past relationship to Israel, reminding Israel that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He shall be remembered throughout all time as the dynamic potential of vitality for those who trust him.

Moses' protests of inadequacy were met by God with the promise that the Israelites would rally to him, and the Egyptians would be confounded. He was instructed to request from Pharaoh permission for a three-day journey into the wilderness for the purpose of religious observations. Opposition by Pharaoh to the plan was anticipated by God, but eventual release would surely be the outcome of God's activities on behalf of Israel.

Moses was not convinced. He had more arguments at his disposal. In the first place, he did not believe that Israel would accept his call and commission from God as authentic. Three miraculous feats of magic were thereby put at his disposal by God, any of which should have made believers of the most skeptical of the people. Moses, however, had thought of another reason why he was the wrong man for the job. He lacked, he said, eloquence of speech, a quality he believed vitally necessary to achieve the freedom of the Israelites. The words of Jeremiah come to mind, a reflection of man's recurring hesitancy to accept God's call: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (Jer. 1:6). Now Moses could scarcely claim immaturity as

his problem; he simply claimed slow ineloquence. God's impatience with these excuses was evinced by his answer to Moses: "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak" (Ex. 4:11-12).

Having his verbal fluency underwritten by God was still insufficient to motivate Moses to go forth on the mission. Finally, he ceased making excuses altogether and spoke his true feelings: "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person" (Ex. 4:13). We can almost see the reluctance grinding away in his thoughts: Just go away, Lord, and quit prodding me. Let me live out my days in undisturbed peace on these hillsides, tending the sheep of Jethro, my father-in-law, living in tranquillity and comfort with my wife and children. Go find some one else to get stirred up over this problem. Moses sought to retain the comfortable, secure *status quo*, but life cannot be suspended, it must always, if it is to remain life, move forward into the future.

God's impatience waxed into anger. Moses' pretexts of inadequacy were cut short when God said he would send Moses' brother, Aaron, to be the spokesman, moving the people with his gift of speech by telling them all that Moses commanded him to say. Aaron, the priest, was to be the "mouthpiece" for Moses, the prophet. Together, the evangelist and the established institution of the priesthood were to be the implements of God's will in history.

All reluctance finally overridden, Moses sought permission from Jethro to return to Egypt to see his kinsmen. Permission granted, he took his wife and sons and they set out on the journey to Egypt. Moses was warned by God to expect the persistent opposition of Pharaoh, and cautioned to use all the miracles which God had put at his disposal. Pharaoh was to be warned by these words: "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me'; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son." (Ex. 4:22-23.) We have in these words the first prophecy of the event

of the Passover, which was God's final warning to Pharaoh.

An episode transpired on the journey that presents tremendous difficulties for the modern mind. We are told by the writer that the Lord met Moses on the way and sought to kill him, being prevented by Zipporah who, circumcising her son, protected Moses from God's wrath by touching Moses' feet with the severed foreskin. She then proclaimed Moses a bridegroom of blood. We are hampered at the outset by the declaration that God should seek to kill the very emissary he had so recently, and at such trouble, persuaded to go seek the release of Israel from Egypt.

We are reminded by such statements throughout the Bible of the tremendous difference in mind-set between us and the Hebrew. The Hebrew, recognizing God as the giver of man's life, believed that all that came about in man's life came from God. Hence we face the difficulty of hearing that God brings evil into life, and can sometimes be persuaded to repent of it (Ex. 32:14). We cannot conceive of existence as a complete parcel, wrapped in the gift of life and delivered in its entirety to us by God. Whatever may have been the original source of this insertion, we are not hereby to understand that the Hebrew regarded God as the so-called "author of evil" in the sense that God was believed to have sent misfortune to his people by deliberate design. God is that one who gives life and promises fulfillment out of all the myriad events that transpire out of the freedom of potential choices to be made by man.

To the Hebrew, God was behind all events that transpired in life, and he made himself known to the people through these events. God it was who controlled history, and God it was who gave meaning to that history. If we study the Bible assiduously enough, we finally arrive at the Hebrew understanding of God at Geneva and hear John Calvin preach and write with authority about the "sovereignty of God." Although the name of Calvin has for many become a popular symbol of long-faced, tyrannical religion which preached the power of a wrathful God, the faith and understanding that motivated Calvin's life, and which brought newness of life to the Reformers, was, in reality, the same

faith that prompted the Hebrew to write of God's attempt on Moses' life.

The matter was a very simple one for the Hebrew. *God is*, believed the Hebrew. The world and all that is in it amply testified to it. We, like the Hebrew, assign a cause to all events in our lives, but we have so *many* reasons for everything. Tommy got the measles *because* he was exposed to the germ, Dick lost his job *because* the office manager was jealous, Jane came down with tuberculosis *because* she lived at a pace too fast and furious for her frail body to keep up with. We would feel timid about blaming God verbally for these transactions with life, except perhaps in a fit of self-pitying anger. Of course, we seldom even credit God with giving us life, except possibly as a sort of "first cause." The only *reason* for any event in the life of the Hebrew, however, whether it be his birth or some lesser event along the way, was God.

How precious is thy steadfast love, O God!  
The children of men take refuge  
in the shadow of thy wings.  
They feast on the abundance of thy house,  
and thou givest them drink from  
the river of thy delights.  
For with thee is the fountain of life;  
in thy light do we see light.

(Ps. 36:7-9.)

We read, then, of God's attempt on Moses' life, possibly still a little uneasily, and are relieved when he recovers and goes on his way. Aaron was sent by God to meet Moses. When they met, Moses revealed God's plan of deliverance, having originally, for some reason, kept the plan secret from Jethro, his father-in-law. Possibly Moses felt it would have been too great a boast to claim to be the one chosen by God to accomplish the freedom of the Israelites. Moses and Aaron went immediately to the elders of the people of Israel, where Aaron's words fell on the ears of the elders as glad news. He spoke to the people all that Moses commanded him, and the people accepted the authenticity of Moses' call and

commission. Rejoicing that God had remembered them in their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

The first great obstacle had thus been easily overcome. The people were persuaded of the genuineness of Moses' call, and united their hearts and will behind him in his approaching effort to bring about their release. What a relief it must have been to Moses that they had accepted him! He was going to need all the support and good will of the people they could give for the bitter struggle about to ensue.

## II

### *Freedom Versus Bread and the Circus*

(Ex., chs. 5; 6)

The ruler of Egypt was regarded by his people as a god—the incarnation of the sun. There were, of course, many gods to whom they pledged their loyalty, but the sun-god had been the first ruler of Egypt and Pharaoh was regarded as his living image. Surely such a member of the gods was familiar with any god who really amounted to anything, but he had evidently never even heard of this obscure deity of the Hebrews. Furthermore, the fact that the Hebrews were the economic property of Pharaoh himself made it fairly obvious that their god must be one of the lesser deities, and one to be little concerned about as a potential threat. There could be no question, certainly, of releasing such an economic asset, least of all on the demand of a god not even familiar to Pharaoh himself.

Moses and Aaron persisted in their demand. "The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." (Ex. 5:3.) Such an appeal to Pharaoh's better nature, nowhere alluded to in the following pages, was destined to fail. He was little troubled by the possible problems to be faced by these slaves if they failed to observe some religious practice peculiar to them. He was perturbed, however, about these disturbers of his economy. "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work?"

Get to your burdens. . . . Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens!" (Ex. 5:4-5.)

This interference in the work of the people by Moses and Aaron had unhappy repercussions. Believing that the people had started thinking of such idle nonsense because they had too much leisure on their hands, Pharaoh ordered their burdens increased. Their Egyptian taskmasters were ordered to cease providing the straw necessary for the manufacture of bricks, forcing the Hebrews to gather their own. The brick quota was not decreased, but was to remain the same. Pharaoh hoped thereby to turn the people's minds to practical, everyday affairs so that they would have no time to regard "lying words" (Ex. 5:9). Hours were thus added to the already long working day of the people, making their situation nearly intolerable. Their welfare was a matter of no concern to Pharaoh, who believed he owned these people. Their very number worked against them, making a continuing plentiful supply of labor.

Such treatment of slaves by Pharaoh was not new, nor did it die with him. Our "modern" world is diseased with this same callousness to the needs and welfare of our brothers. The black natives of South Africa, crushed under the oppression of the Afrikaners, are jailed on almost any pretext, from failure to carry an identity card to failure to pay their taxes. Such prisoners are put at the disposal of the Afrikaan farmers for plentiful and cheap labor. As a matter of fact, in order to accommodate the farmers with greater convenience, the prisons—crude stockades resembling animal corrals—are located in the heart of the farming country, lessening transportation problems. The laborers are beaten when they are not sufficiently productive, and left to die if they do not revive from the beatings. This situation about which we speak is not the recounting of human relations as they existed three thousand years ago, but as they exist now, scarcely ruffling the conscience of the superenlightened, 1960 world.

For perhaps an even more terrifying example, we need only backtrack in history a few years. Instead of building the slave labor camps in the midst of the demand, the executives of the

Krupp, Siemens, and I. G. Farben corporations of Nazi Germany built their war matériel factories in the neighborhood of the camps of Ravensbrueck, Neuengamme, and Auschwitz, to cut transportation costs on slave labor. The gassing facilities of the camps were convenient and prepared to take care of those who were no longer able to turn out a sufficient production schedule. In order to facilitate accurate bookkeeping of the transient flow of slave labor, the workers were identified merely by numbers tattooed on their skin. The executives of the factories provided sufficient weapons for the control of the enforced labor, and in turn for such cheap labor made the arrangement financially profitable to the government, who could run their concentration camps at no financial burden—plus the fact that many stock companies reaped tremendous financial benefit through this human exploitation.<sup>1</sup> Volumes have been written documenting similar treatment of the slaves in this country in the last century, but then we are getting ahead of our story.

The lives of the Hebrews became so intolerable that they sent their foremen to protest to Pharaoh. This delegation was regarded by Pharaoh as a group of labor agitators, asking for better hours and more favorable working conditions. Their very presence in his court, with such unrealistic demands, verified the fact that the Hebrews had too much idle time, or they would not be concerned with such foolishness as going off on a trip to make sacrifices to their God. Moses and Aaron eagerly awaited the return of the delegation, anxious to hear what results they had achieved.

The foremen were bitter in their denunciation of the prophet and the priest and said, "The Lord look upon you and judge, because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us" (Ex. 5:21). The entire situation became clouded over with gloom. The Hebrews were defeated in their efforts to leave, and in addition, the little latitude they had enjoyed in their lives previously had been narrowed by their increased hardships to the point of making life nearly unendurable.

Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why hast thou done evil to this people? Why didst thou ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and thou hast not delivered thy people at all." (Ex. 5:22-23.)

It is difficult to perceive this miserable defeat as God's first victory over Pharaoh, but as long as the Israelites could in the least endure their lives in Egypt, they would choose the security there afforded over the intangible precariousness of a proposed journey into the wilderness. As long as they retained any dependency on Pharaoh for substance and meaning in their lives, they were not likely to turn to complete dependency on God. The chicken in the pot was worth two promised in the wilderness.

God commanded Moses to tell the Israelites again the purpose of his call to them. They were to be delivered from Egypt in order to become God's people, depending on God alone, knowing that he is the Lord who has delivered them. The role of the chosen people in history is thus shaped by God. In his few words to Moses, God told who the Israelites were to be, and Israel throughout its history struggled against, forgot, or ignored this identity. Israel asks the question in The Book of Job, "Who am I?" and the answer is given in The Book of Jonah, but it is an answer that Israel steadfastly refused to accept. The prophets repeatedly tried to tell Israel, but the people turned a deaf ear to their words.

The history of Israel is the history of every man, and every man, by active choice or passive default, decides who he will be. He can pursue the values of the world, ignoring the call of God which comes to him, or he can answer that call by God to be free. The trouble with the Israelites was that they never wanted to be *free*. It was a fate they always fought, because to be free means also to be responsible. It was far easier to abrogate individual freedom by adopting someone else's standards, attitudes, and evaluation of the meaning of life, than to accept one's own life and face its demand for making responsible choices under God, without the guidance of some external system of values.

We turn again for illustration to Franz Kafka, who has so

reliably captured the dilemma of man seeking meaning for his life from a source outside his own reality. In his work *The Castle*, he writes of the man who seeks to establish contact with the mysterious dwellers of a castle, who are supposed to give him instructions for the scheme of his life and let him know what his place in the world should be. Although he spends his entire life in a frantic effort to reach them that they may structure his life, he never succeeds, and the result, as always when one looks to someone or something, other than God, outside oneself for meaning, is despair and a feeling of helplessness.

Man has always tried to rid himself of his "self" in order to escape the responsibility of freedom. He either conforms to a rule ready-made in the present, or clings to some rule from the past, but in so doing he can never turn to the future, because the future is unstructured. To provide a sense of identity, he conforms to the patterns of those around him (in Israel's case in her later history, she turned to the nations already extant in the Promised Land), and to provide a sense of security, he hedges himself in with encompassing laws governing every aspect of his behavior (amply illustrated in Israel's complex system of law). He is then released from deciding, first, who he is, and secondly, the honest, minute-by-minute evaluation of and decision for being that one. He contents himself with the meaning of life as others describe it, and he is protected from having to choose his actions by following the rules already set down, rules that relieve him from all responsibility for his choices.

Now, you are going to ask about those who gain meaning for their lives from dominating others. The fact that they are quite ready to provide both the meaning and the law for others to follow, you will say, creates a new category, and disproves the statement that men seek to escape responsibility. The situation is different merely on the surface, however, for it consists also in a person's endeavoring to infuse his life with meaning from outside himself, whether from slave or voluntary follower. The exercise of power over others provides meaning for life behind which one is able to hide from the truth about himself, and escape the re-

sponsibility for being the one he in reality is.

Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote what is perhaps literature's most powerful description of the anathema of mankind — the attempt to escape from freedom. In *The Brothers Karamazov* there is a chapter entitled "The Grand Inquisitor" which tells of Christ's return to earth during the Inquisition in Spain. He came quietly, unobtrusively, but was recognized by all the common people in the streets who were drawn to him and followed him. These were the poor people, oppressed by the church, not daring to think for themselves or to decide anything concerning their relationship to God, which was the exclusive domain of the orthodox church.

Christ's popularity is soon cut short by the intervention of the cardinal himself, who orders Christ to be taken by the guards and thrown into prison. In the darkness of the night the Grand Inquisitor comes into his cell and asks: "Is it Thou? Thou?" Without waiting for an answer, he then asks why Christ has come to hinder the good work of the church, which just the previous day had burned at the stake nearly a hundred heretics.

Christ's immediate situation is made clear to him: he will be burned at the stake on the following day, by the same people who followed him in the streets, as the worst of the heretics. It was this same Christ who had fifteen hundred years earlier said to men, "I will make you free." That freedom promised by Christ as God's gift to men has been given into the hands of the church, which has at last nearly managed to take that freedom away. When the church finally succeeds in this task for the benefit of mankind, the Grand Inquisitor says, it will be possible to make men happy.

Christ is reminded of his temptation in the wilderness when he had rejected, in favor of freedom, the very tools necessary to bring about man's happiness. He had chosen not to enslave men to him by offering them bread or authority — a full stomach and a dead conscience. Men would have followed him like sheep if they had been offered security in bread and the loss of hateful freedom in once-and-for-all, unquestionable power and authority.

They would not then have been faced with having to decide for Christ — such decision would have become automatic when their stomachs had been filled with bread and their spirits with a clear-cut, ready-made blueprint to control their behavior. But Christ had refused, saying that men could not truly belong to God if they were enslaved by him — they must belong to God by free choice as free men, depending on God alone to provide their lives with meaning.

So after fifteen hundred years the church has nearly been able to undo such mischief as that which Christ had proposed, and just within sight is the victory, a victory which will relieve man completely of his freedom and provide him with the allurements of happiness bountifully promised in the reward of a posthumous heaven and eternity.

Men will be completely liberated from the problem of anxiety and the dreadful burden of making decisions for which they must bear the responsibility alone. Christ is told, "I tell thee that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born." Man, thus led by lying and deception, but released from the burden of self, can live out his life unaware of the path on which he walks. He need not be disappointed if his life is not immediately fulfilled — he can always look forward to the all-compensating reward of heaven. This promise in turn obscures from him the necessity for facing the certainty that he will one day die.<sup>2</sup>

Israel's reaction to her weaning from Egypt was an ancient verification of the words of the Grand Inquisitor. She had no more taste for freedom and responsibility than those persons in Dostoevsky's story who gladly did the bidding of the Grand Inquisitor when they burned any accused of heresy by the church. God's call to freedom was passed on to Israel by Moses, but it went unheeded, and the people sank farther into misery and despair, blaming Moses for their aggravated condition. The call had come to them — the call to be a free people and to live in trust of God and love of fellow man, and they refused to hear.

Nevertheless, God told Moses to return to Pharaoh to seek the release of Israel.

This was too much for Moses, who said, "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, who am a man of uncircumcised lips?" (Ex. 6:12), referring to his lack of eloquence of speech. Moses hesitated, but God, unconcerned by the fact that he was unknown to Pharaoh, able to withstand the challenge of all the gods of Egypt, certain of his eventual triumph and the deliverance of even these stubborn, willful people, whom he had chosen as his first-born, gave Moses and Aaron a charge to the people of Israel, and to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

### III

## *Let My People Go*

(Ex., chs. 7 to 10)

The adversities of the days ahead were not minimized by God. The difficulties themselves were, in the long run, to add to God's glory and the brilliance of the victory to be won. Having the way made more difficult would make the victory even more wondrous, forcing the Egyptians to know the all-reaching power of the God of Israel. The defeat of Pharaoh would mean the defeat of the gods of Egypt, since Pharaoh was their commander-in-chief.

The miraculous signs given to Moses and Aaron were not to be used before the people, only before Pharaoh. When they went before him with their request, Aaron cast down his rod and it became a serpent. Not to be intimidated by such unimpressive feats of magic, the wise men of the court — keepers of the keys for Egypt's gods — duplicated the feat, whereupon their rods were swallowed by Aaron's rod. God was to be the vanquisher of these gods of the Egyptians. Pharaoh was not impressed; his heart remained unmoved and his will obdurate. Just as God had warned Moses, Pharaoh did not listen to their pleas.

Pharaoh and God squared off for the contest to follow. The outcome is never questioned by God — Pharaoh may be cockily confident and Israel fearfully pessimistic, but God does not doubt his ability to deliver the Israelites and defeat Pharaoh. The hostilities began unpretentiously enough, and for a while God did not force the issue, but took his time, adding one small gain to another. Pharaoh began the combat unwilling to make any concessions whatsoever, but slowly, inexorably, God pushed him back

toward the wall. Pharaoh's unconcern about this god he did not know grew into a blind panic. Each sign, foretold by Moses, was a demand on Pharaoh, and the inevitable result was symbolic of unyielding, stiff-necked disobedience.

The account of the ten plagues visited upon Egypt has long been a storm center of Biblical scholarship. Various attempts have been made to explain them by means of natural phenomena. If we become involved in the fruitless effort to confirm either a miraculous, or a natural, explanation for these events, we are ignoring the significance of this magnificent duel; we become embroiled, in that manner, in the pursuit of abstract knowledge, confusing it with truth. Abstract knowledge of the veracity of given facts may have nothing to do with what is the truth for me. The facts are translated into truth for me by my relationship to them. If we are interested in truth, then we must overcome this chasm between what is abstractly true and what is existential truth for the living man. Whatever explanation of the plagues we choose to accept, the important point is that Israel recognized God as the power who controls nature. These miracles were the tools that effected Israel's eventual deliverance from slavery to the place chosen for the fulfillment of the promise.

With each plague, Moses' bargaining power increased. The first resulted in the pollution of the waters of Egypt, causing them to flow red and making the water undrinkable for the people or for the cattle and other animals. We are told that Pharaoh's magicians had similar powers, and Pharaoh remained obstinately unmoved. A week passed, and Moses was commanded to go to Pharaoh, saying:

"Thus says the Lord, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs; the Nile shall swarm with frogs which shall come up into your house, and into your bed-chamber and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls; the frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.'" (Ex. 8:1-4.)

Such a graphic description fairly has one brushing away the frogs. Pharaoh's magicians were able once more to thwart Moses, but some progress is evidenced by Pharaoh's entreaty to Moses to ask God to call off the frogs, and he promises that he will then allow Israel to go sacrifice to the Lord. This empty promise was broken practically before it was made. There seemed no urgency about the situation as soon as there was a respite from the frogs.

There is next the account of the plague of the gnats. All the dust of the earth became gnats — a situation in dusty Egypt too intense to be imagined, and too difficult to be duplicated by the court magicians. This was followed by the swarms of flies which brought havoc to the land. There is a variation in the pattern at this point. God, using the plague as a sign to prove that Yahweh is God, set apart the land of Goshen where the Hebrews dwelt, and they were left untouched by this and the succeeding plagues. Pharaoh was beginning to show signs of wear — he consented this time for Israel to go sacrifice to God as long as they confined their journey to the boundaries of Egypt. This offer was hastily rejected by Moses, who pointed out that their religious practices would be so foreign and distasteful to the Egyptian people that they would surely be stoned. Then Pharaoh agreed to let them go into the wilderness, but not too far. Moses agreed to intercede with God for the cessation of the swarms of flies, warning Pharaoh against treachery. To no avail — the urgency of the problem faded once again with the removal of the discomfort, and the promise was again recanted.

Israel's herds and flocks of animals were protected from the succeeding plague, which killed off the cattle of the Egyptians. Pharaoh was given a twenty-four-hour grace period for the purpose of repentance. Even in the face of the ruin of his land and the death of his cattle, he refused to heed God's warning that destruction of life is the price of disobedience. Nor did the following epidemic of boils on all the Egyptians stir him. His magicians had fallen before the power given into the hand of Moses, and were by this time unable even to protect themselves from the boils.

Preceding the following plague, Pharaoh was first told by Moses that God had merely been toying with him, while giving him ample opportunity to surrender. It was within his power at any time to cut off the king and his subjects entirely, but God intended to use this man's disobedience to make himself known throughout all the earth. While we are impatient to speed the wheels of justice, God uses the very injustices we desire to eliminate for the demonstration of the fact that he is the God of history who can wait out the tyrant, who will, in the end, harvest the seeds of self-destruction.

Although Pharaoh refused to bow before God, his people had become aware and frightened of the power set against them. There were those who sheltered their cattle and households from the heavy hail God had threatened. Every living thing that remained in the open was shattered, except, of course, in the land of Goshen where there was no hail and the Hebrews remained safe. Pharaoh pledged again that the people could go, if only God would make the storm cease. His repentance must have been lacking the tone of sincerity, because Moses did not believe him, and as before, he did not keep his word.

The crops of wheat and spelt, which had not as yet grown high enough to be damaged by the hail, and what remained of trees or other vegetation that had somehow escaped the damage of the hail, were threatened by a plague of locusts such as the Egyptians had not seen since the time of their grandfathers. There could be heard a rumbling of discontent in the court. Pharaoh's servants lamented that the land was already ruined, and asked what more the people must be made to endure. Evaluating his increasingly tenuous position, Pharaoh consented to Moses' request. Following his consent, he asked specifically who would be leaving to take part in the religious observance, and when Moses told him that the entire colony would be going, plus the herds and flocks, he made a sarcastic refusal, giving permission for only the men to go, leaving the families and flocks behind as a warranty for their return.

A land can sustain just so much adversity, and Egypt was ap-

proaching the saturation point — the end of the contest began to loom on the horizon. The locusts covered the face of the land, practically obliterating it. Pharaoh's panic became openly evident, and he actually admitted when Moses was summoned this time that he had sinned against God and the people of Israel. He pleaded for mercy just once more, only to retract his repentance with the cessation of the plague.

An ominous warning of the end spread across Egypt. God clothed the land in a darkness so heavy the writer of Exodus states it could be felt. Darkness had always struck a special dread in the heart of the Egyptian, whose chief object of worship was the sun. The Children of Israel went about their daily tasks as usual. The source of light dwelt in their midst, and the darkness did not touch Goshen. This time Pharaoh consented for all of Israel to go, if they would leave behind their flocks and herds. Pharaoh did not understand that even a man's possessions belong to God and must have their place in his service and worship. He could not deny God that which already belonged to him.

Everywhere Pharaoh looked in the land he believed belonged to him, he could see the dreadful results of his own self-willed glory. His land had been reduced to barren desolation, his people bathed in the tears of a life made unbearable. The cattle which had wandered in peace through the pastures, eating leisurely of the grass that grew there, were now silenced, and the fields lay strewn with their bones. The trees and shrubbery no longer cast their green silhouettes against a blue sky. Their branches had been stripped of leaves by the hail which had sown the fields with diamond-bright destruction. Drifts of gnats, flies, and locusts were piled against the walls of the city. The country lay like the naked bones of a skeleton, stripped of the flesh of life by a man crazed with the urgency of power and self-glory.

After all this, could it be that Pharaoh refused to concede freedom to the Hebrews because he felt that he had been the unjust victim of coincidence? Had Moses merely happened on the scene at an opportune moment, a moment crowded with the possibilities of natural disaster? Had he simply seized the

moment as a toll to pry the Israelites free from the enslaving grasp of Egypt, recognizing its possibility for reducing a superstitious populace to an unwieldy mob, whose fury roused against the king would work to his advantage? Did Pharaoh believe that with the eventual cessation of the troubles that plagued Egypt, which must surely come, Moses would lose his power to stir the people, and the Hebrew slaves would once again become the docile domestic pack animals of yesterday?

Each time a plague had been lifted from Egypt, Pharaoh could say: "Ah, this fool Moses thinks I really believe he has caused the wind to carry pestilence into our land, and disease into the very blood of my people! Whatever weakness has governed me when I have been drowned in disaster, I now put away from me. I am a sensible, rational man, and I know that even were I to give in to his hysterical demands, nature would continue to stalk my land with her curses, until she finally tires and leaves us in peace once more to rebuild our nation."

Megalomania like Pharaoh's has carried more than one nation to doom—his spirit has seen its reincarnation in the Alexanders, the Ivans, the Napoleons, the Mussolinis, the Hirohitos, and the Hitlers of this world. His frenzied will for self-determination was slowly developing into a one-way street to hell. It was the darkness of Pharaoh's soul that shut out the light from Egypt; the shadow of his desire to be absolute and unlimited stopped the bright light of God's truth from illuminating the reality in his life—that no man, created to be finite, can make himself infinite; for no man possesses a power of magic proportions resulting from infallible reason, flawless foresight, all-encompassing knowledge. Pharaoh was an ancient Faust, who had tried to make a pact with the devil in an endeavor to overcome the power of God. Pharaoh had completely lost touch with the concrete proportions of reality—he had lost his capacity for living in the moment that had been given to him, and had begun to live in a mythical instant in history when he would be able to overcome the very finitude in which he found himself trapped. His wrath at the circumstances in which he found

himself trapped was directed against Moses, who was the personal embodiment of the forces of life against which he was pushing. His fury with Moses threatened Moses' very life — his anger shook itself in Moses' face, saying, "I'll show you!"

Moses was the vicissitude of Pharaoh's life, which shut him in and forced him to recognize the creature he was. Like Budd Schulberg's Sammy Glick, Pharaoh started running to prove to the forces that surrounded his life that he could grab life by the throat and shape it to his own desire. What made Pharaoh run? The willful belief that he could shape his own life. But as all the Glen-plaid sports jackets and yellow suede shoes in the world could not deliver Sammy from life-destroying despair, neither could palaces, monuments, prestige, and a power that reduced the peoples under his hand to puppets save Pharaoh from the hand of God, who had created him.

When Moses rejected the offer for the Hebrews to go into the wilderness leaving their flocks and herds behind, it moved Pharaoh to such a state of fury that he threatened Moses' life if ever he saw him again. "As you say! I will not see your face again," said Moses. (Ex. 10:29.) This was a promise that very soon Pharaoh would be glad to have rescinded.

## IV

# *The Death of the Gods*

(Ex. 11:1 to 15:21)

Pharaoh had threatened to take the life of God's prophet. It was not the first time Moses had been in danger of losing his life. He had escaped the death edict for all Hebrew male children at his birth, when Pharaoh, like a Herod out of his time, had sought the lives of the male children of the chosen people. The defiance of his mother and the daughter of the king had preserved Moses' life. God would answer Pharaoh's present threat. Moses was given explicit instructions by God for the days to follow. Moses' reputation, by this time, placed him in the category of V.I.P. as far as the Egyptians were concerned, and when he told his people to procure from their Egyptian neighbors jewelry of silver and gold, it was readily given them.

Moses then declared to Pharaoh the final catastrophe from God's hand that would befall Egypt:

"Thus says the Lord: About midnight I will go forth in the midst of Egypt; and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits upon his throne, even to the first-born of the maidservant who is behind the mill; and all the first-born of the cattle. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever shall be again." (Ex. 11:4-6.)

The Hebrew people were, of course, exempt from the threatened catastrophe; neither they nor their animals would be harmed. According to the beliefs of the Hebrew people, the

threat against the first-born was a threat against the entire people of Egypt, for the first-born was a symbol of the whole. When Egypt's first-born were gone, the victory over their gods would be complete. Israel was given instructions for the preparation and observance of three religious rites — the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Dedication of the First-born — which were to be a reminder throughout her history of the deliverance from Egypt.

The Feast of the Passover itself was to be observed by each family. A young, unblemished lamb would be selected, providing the blood to mark the lintel and doorposts of each house. After the doors were thus marked, no Hebrews were to leave their houses, but, outfitting themselves for the journey to come, they were to roast the lamb and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, burning any that remained. They were to eat the meal in haste, standing, clothed for travel in sandals and robes, otherwise never worn inside the house. They must be ready to leave at a moment's notice. The sign in blood on the doors would be a sign to the Lord, who would pass over the houses of the Hebrews when he smote Egypt with the hand of death.

This was to be all-out war for the deliverance of a little band of Hebrew slaves, so unimportant in the annals of secular history their flight passed unnoticed. The blood of Egypt was to be spilled because a stubborn, greedy little king refused to face the truth about himself. He was not omnipotent — he could not rebel against God without paying the consequences. He thought only of the greatness of his land, surpassing all those surrounding it, made rich and comfortable in large measure by the unlimited slave labor at its disposal. The structures erected for the nation by these slaves were to be a lasting memorial to this man who reveled in the wealth and power of his nation, led to greatness under his rule.

He was, in the final analysis, forced to sacrifice everything in order to support a fallacious principle. His idols of greatness, wealth, and personal power crashed from their pedestals and

lay like Dagon before the Ark of God in the temple of the Philistines. Like the Philistines, Pharaoh had been sufficiently warned by the waves of disaster that had laid waste his land. Dagon, the national god of the Philistines, had first merely been toppled from his pedestal. He was found in the morning face down on the floor of the temple before the Ark of the Lord, which the Philistines had profaned by placing it in their pagan temple. When the idol was restored to its place, it was again struck from its pedestal. The following morning the Philistines found their god in the same position as before, face down on the floor, but this time the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off — only the trunk remained. (I Sam., ch. 5.)

As the god of the Philistines was revealed to be powerless, so Pharaoh was powerless to stem the final disaster to his people. At the hour of midnight the hand of death claimed all the first-born, from the first-born of Pharaoh to the first-born of captives in the dungeon. Even the cattle did not escape. There was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where one was not dead. The cry of the idol worshipers filled the land with a torrent of grief and terror. But then, this was war, and war is hell, and those who wage it should not complain when it does not turn out to be otherwise, for mankind has had ample opportunity to test the truth of this statement since the birth of nations. There was no escape — even those who urged Pharaoh to give in to the God of the Hebrews did not escape. Neither did those who pressed gifts of silver and gold into the hands of the fleeing Hebrews.

Nations that disobey God, willfully flouting the command to live in love with their fellow men, must expect, sooner or later, to pay the price — and the price for disobedience is death. Live in hate and die. It is as simple as that. An individual lives in hate, disregarding the welfare and rights of his fellow man, and the hate consumes him like a malignancy, robbing him of his freedom, usurping his constructive talents, and destroying his capacity to respond to life as a good gift from God.

At the risk of repeating a tiresome observation, I shall say with so many others that the similarities of the war between Pharaoh

and God and the conflict of the War Between the States are dramatic. In both instances the armies were fighting in the same war for different reasons. The Confederate soldier was sent to fight to protect the economic wealth and the old-world comfort of the Confederacy, vested in four million black men who tilled the soil of the Southern plantations, creating such a divergency of culture between North and South that these two sections were practically different nations. The cry of the South was for Congressional protection of slavery in the territories, sensing its cause completely lost if the balance of power in the nation swung to antislave states newly admitted to the union. The sentimental and economic organization of the South lay static in an aura reflecting the 1790's. It had so long refused change, it regarded the *status quo* as divinely blessed, and prepared first to secede to maintain it, and thence to fight to do so. As the North became an industrial power, the South became, by comparison, economically weaker, being unable to use the large slave population which had thus far sustained the standard of living for anything other than agricultural purposes. An educated or skilled slave would soon cease to be amenable to slavery.

The righteous cry of the Abolitionists, blended from political and ethical motivations, rose ever higher and higher, and the struggle in Congress between the North and the South resulted in blocking the growth of the nation and in an ever-increasing estrangement. While antislavery sentiment was stimulated in the North by the brutal enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law after 1850, still the Federal soldier, shedding his blood in the Wilderness, at Spotsylvania Court House, at Bloody Angle, believed he was fighting to preserve the Union, a goal that had been wrapped in the bunting of patriotism and handed to him. The greatness of his land, both present and potential, was his goal.

Behind all the confusion and conflicting motives of the soldiers in the trenches, one glimpses a reluctant band of Hebrews, willing to settle for slavery, with only slightly improved terms, embittered toward Moses for the increased hardships he had caused them instead, and an Egyptian populace who cried out in bewil-

derment to Pharaoh, reminding him of the ruin of the land and disasters that had overtaken them. The confusion in the ranks was not shared at the top level. Pharaoh, like the Confederate leaders, who also in the final analysis sacrificed everything for a fallacious principle, knew why he was battling. So did Moses, who carried the colors for God in the struggle that would manifest God's supremacy in the birth of a free people who belonged to him.

The determination to free the Hebrew slaves was reflected in the face of another liberator, who knew the ultimate goal of the victory he struggled to achieve. A scant hundred years ago there stood a man with a heart only for peace, but no stomach for oppression and slavery. He found himself eulogized as another Moses by the ignorant black slaves whose historical memory had been created by the unschooled preachers on the plantations, who filled them with stories of a God who had delivered a band of slaves to freedom in the ancient past. The Hebrews became their ancestors, and Abraham Lincoln was Moses reincarnated. Lincoln's call to be deliverer was answered by the pain in his face which clearly cried out, "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person." But when God asked again, "Whom shall I send?" there was only this haunted man to say, "Here am I, Lord, send me." Having been plunged into the war for clearly political concerns, he knew, nevertheless, that at the heart of the matter the conflict could only be dispelled by the eventual release of four million slaves from captivity. It was a long walk to the shore of a sea of undivided waters, and Lincoln's staff to separate those waters was the Federal army, a generation of sons who sank in the murky waters of the conflict encouraged by Southern leaders who fatally believed "the North would not fight"—a generation of first-born Confederate sons was sucked down behind them.

There were none left untouched by the horrors of this conflict over the rights of the slaves. There are no innocents in wars—and the combined losses of the Blue and the Gray approached one million men, from death and disablement. As the co-operative

Egyptians had not been spared, neither were the noncombatants caught in the dreadful cross fire of the Civil War. When men defy God's commandment of love, and strike against their fellow men, determined to overpower and kill, not only must they pay the price themselves, but they invariably carry with them many who are not directly involved in the fruits of hate. The peaceful, pious, pacifist farmers of the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia tilled their soil and fed the Confederate army, not necessarily always by choice, but Sheridan's soldiers marched the length of the valley, covering it with a choking fog of destruction, burning barns and destroying crops so that a crow flying its length would find it necessary to carry its own provender, to borrow Grant's words. The duty of destroying a beautiful, fertile valley, still bathed in an aura of peace, a commodity that was only a misty, nostalgic memory in the minds of the weary, disillusioned Federal troops, was very painful. It was a job that sickened these young-grown-old men, whose youthful ideas of the glory of war had not included such duty as a part of protecting the Union.

We have become more humane with the years—we have greatly relieved our soldiers of such odious duty. Perhaps this has become a necessity since our young people's ideas of military heroism have become somewhat jaded by the events of the past fifty years. Yes, it is easier now to destroy a peaceful valley, because it is no longer necessary to see the face of a wrinkled old woman as one moves his own hand to fire her barns and wipe out her winter supplies, and one's own voice need not be raised to drive the cattle from the barns out into the raped countryside, over the protesting plea of a young, terrified, weeping war widow, anxiously comforting three small children clinging to her skirt in terror.

It is easier now, and considerably more efficient. One need only command the electronic release of bombs, dropped from a height which transforms the valley into impersonal, variegated chessboards. At fifty thousand feet the land is furnished with smudges, instead of barns, and is vacant of people. What one is unable to see he need not admit is there. Such destruction is being eagerly

perfected, and soon, with the maturity of guided missiles, entire continents can be destroyed merely by consulting the cold, two-dimensional, bloodless lines of a map. But still, all's fair in love and war, although we seldom have opportunity to test the rules as they apply to the former. The hand that burns the barns, or releases the bombs, or computes the path of the guided missile, is no guiltier of death and destruction resulting from disobedience to the command of love, nor more subject to its toll, than the hand that never pulled the lever in a voting booth, or the voice that cries out for the vindication of national honor and reaps the profits from the ensuing holocaust.

There are no innocents in war — but there are no victors either. The wars of the twentieth century have been fought chiefly in the name of freedom, just as was the death struggle a hundred years ago to free a handful of black-skinned slaves, full of ignorance and bowed down with defeat, or as was the dreadful contest between a man called Pharaoh and God, to free a handful of dismal, complaining Hebrew slaves. Every such struggle results in the loss of a generation of first-born, and no home is without its sorrow or anguish. Recent history testifies that we seem able to time our wars, fought mainly for idolatrous reasons similar to Pharaoh's, just right to wipe out each succeeding generation of first-born. The wars go on, and the cries of the enslaved drift through the gates of heaven. Men opposing the one commandment decreed by God have destroyed one generation of first-born after another until it appears we are

here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.<sup>3</sup>

Unable to accept God's way with his life, Pharaoh was struck by the final blow. The cry of bereavement echoed across the land of Egypt, and Pharaoh, shedding his mask as a god, urgently sent Moses and the Israelites from the land with all their possessions. Moses said to his people, "Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by

strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place.” (Ex. 13:3.) In the hush of the waiting land, the feet of the Israelites marched out of the land of Goshen, and Egypt surveyed the ruin of her Appomattox, and perhaps none would ever know how much of the blood shed was God’s blood shed for those he would have drawn to himself as his own.

Israel’s rebirth was to be marked by the actual changing of the calendar, and thenceforth their year was to begin with this same month as a reminder of their deliverance. All the firstlings of Israel’s animals were to be dedicated to God, and as the first-born of the Egyptians were lost in the battle of disobedience against God, God promised the redemption of the first-born of his sons.

God led Israel out of Egypt by his own route—a way not customarily chosen by men as they traveled to and from Egypt. The Israelites were in this way protected from becoming engaged in a war with the Philistines, which might have caused them to lose heart, persuading them to return to Egypt. The people carried in their midst the bones of Joseph, abiding by his instructions left with their fathers so long before. God’s presence, experienced as a pillar of cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night, enabling them to travel both night and day, led them to an encampment by the sea. They were placed in a vulnerable position which would tempt Pharaoh to pursue and attack, providing an opportunity to certify God’s victory over the gods of Egypt.

When the people of Israel saw the Egyptian army marching after them, they were overcome with fear. As usual, Moses was their whipping boy, receiving the brunt of their anger:

“Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” (Ex. 14:11-12.)

This is the first verse of what was to become Israel’s national theme song. Bread and the circus, and you may even go easy on

the circus, if you must, Israel cries, but do not expect us to become free men, responsible for our own lives. Yet what had God called Israel to be? The people were called to be free, but they did not want freedom. The chosen people walked a tortuous path throughout their history to rid themselves of the freedom God kept thrusting upon them.

Man has never wanted freedom. He seeks, instead, authority to relieve himself of it, as at the very first he had eaten the fruit of the tree which would allow him to set down once and for all a pattern of what he deemed good and evil in life. Such a chart must be followed by an extensive set of laws and rules governing behavior for the purpose of avoiding evil and perpetrating good according to men's ideas, and taking the guesswork out of living. Man seeks in the forbidden fruit a concrete blueprint, the construction of which will give meaning to his life. The blueprint is elevated to the throne of worship, and the complex rules for carrying out this worship relieve him of the necessity and responsibility of decision.

Man has been called to worship a God whom he cannot see; such worship, he is told, will issue in a life whose meaning is made manifest in the moment-by-moment choice to trust God in whatever comes. Man has the freedom to be open to the future, to trust God in the moment, or to shrink back from the future and its hidden intangibles and cling to the solid, earth-born structure of law and man-made institutions. Whatever he decides, God gives him up to his choice, but he has been warned that he is choosing life on the one hand and death on the other.

The Israelites stood on the precipice of choice, whining to Moses about their plight, unwilling to choose the life that was being offered them. Moses hushed them as he might complaining children, commanding them to witness their deliverance from God's hand which they should soon see. When Moses turned to God for a way out of the predicament, God said to him, in effect, "Don't just stand there—*do* something!" That something was to turn their backs on the Egyptians who were bearing down upon them with horses and chariots and weapons of war.

They were asked to turn their backs on the past, on dependence upon anything other than God to provide sustenance and meaning for their lives. But when Israel, God's son, turned to face the future to which God was calling him, all he saw was a forbidding stretch of water lapping at his feet. In a state of near panic the people turned to Moses, who thereupon turned to God; but God had just one thing to say to them, "Go forward!" (Ex. 14:15). As long as the Israelites were firmly rooted in the past, they could see no future — they could see nothing but the murky, undivided waters stretching out before them. Surely this could not be the future, this flat, treacherous-looking span of water, without shape, without design, without even the promise of safety. Yet is not this the very nature of the future? God was calling them to walk into the unstructured future, leaving the past without a backward glance.

No amount of speculation or explanation can clarify that which followed. This was God's redemptive act for Israel, as it is for all men who respond to his call to sonship. By this act Israel was rescued from the past and given the future as the gift of life. The Israelites always looked back to this moment in their history, when the waters parted for their passage, as the birth of new life which was the issue of their labor across the sea. If firm footing for their passage was given them by the receding tidewaters of the Red Sea, it was no less a miracle to a people accustomed only to the tideless Mediterranean Sea.

God was speaking to Israel when he confused the Egyptians by a cloud of darkness while creating a pillar of light for his chosen ones. He was speaking to Israel when he formed dry land in the midst of the waters, a creative act of love for his chosen ones, and when he finally closed the waters of the sea over the Egyptians as they struggled in vain to drive their chariots and horses to safety. God was speaking to all who worship idols, declaring his jealousy of man's allegiance which he claims as his own. As the walls of water returned to destroy Egypt's power over Israel, at last the Egyptians recognized the truth which had so relentlessly pursued

them through the long days of warning: "Let us flee from before Israel; for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians" (Ex. 14:25). Egypt's gods were dead, their impotence exposed; trust in anything other than the one true God had proved fatal. As God had in the beginning created the light to overcome the darkness and formed the dry land in the midst of the waters, he had again expressed his love for Israel, his chosen son.

The Israelites sent up a song of triumph as they exulted in jubilation over the destruction of the army of Egypt. Israel was joyful that God had crushed the hateful enemy, and proclaimed that there was no other god like him. Yet, nowhere do their songs and shouts of triumph demonstrate that they actually comprehended the truth of what had taken place. They were delighted, of course, with the revenge on the Egyptians, but God was simply given a superior place among the gods. "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?" their song asks. (Ex. 15:11.) What they did not grasp, and what man has as yet failed to comprehend, is that God has destroyed the gods. They have been rendered powerless, and nothing that they represent can ever give meaning to life, but will lead their worshipers to death. Neither power, success, self-justification, prestige, nor any of the other false gods that man worships can fulfill his life, because the gods lie in a watery grave where once and for all God has claimed his victory. God alone, and his command to love, can bring fulfillment to life.

The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice;  
let the many coastlands be glad!  
Clouds and thick darkness are round about him;  
righteousness and justice are the foundations  
of his throne.  
Fire goes before him,  
and burns up his adversaries round about.  
His lightnings lighten the world;  
the earth sees and trembles.  
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,  
before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim his righteousness;  
and all the peoples behold his glory.  
All worshipers of images are put to shame,  
who make their boast in worthless idols;  
all gods bow down before him.  
(Ps. 97:1-7.)

## V

### *Gripe! Gripe! Gripe!*

(Ex. 15:21 to 16:36)

“Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses?” (Heb. 3:16.) Thus asks the writer of The Letter to the Hebrews, recalling the more or less continuous strife between Moses and the grumbling multitude he had led into the wilderness. There is, however, a relative inaccuracy in his question. According to the Old Testament account, the role played by Moses as the leader of the people was relatively insignificant. Lest I have aroused indignation in the reader’s heart, let me hasten to say I do not disparage the obvious greatness of the man Moses, who stood steadfast as God’s instrument of leadership. God’s call was not to Moses, however—it was to Israel, to a people chosen to be his own. Moses was God’s confrontation and demand to Israel, and the remainder of the account of the exodus is the story of God and his people—God and his church. Moses was certainly a man of almost perfect trust in God—he was the right man for the job. On the other hand, we really have less of the flavor of his personality than we have, say, of Pharaoh’s, or of the grouching Hebrews’.

Pharaoh’s chief antagonist had not been Moses, although it was Moses who stood before him. The troubler of Egypt was Yahweh, and it was he who defeated the gods of Egypt. When the people were in need of a leader in their flight, it was not Moses who led them, although he walked at the head of their company. The pillar of cloud and fire went before the people as their leader. When the waters of the sea prevented the escape of the Israelites before the onrushing Egyptians, it was Yahweh who commanded the

wind and the waters and, as at the creation, made dry land for the reluctant feet of the people to walk on.

Being faithful readers of our Bibles, of course, we are immediately reminded of a dramatic retelling of this story in the New Testament. The disciples were crossing the sea in a boat when a great storm arose. Jesus slept undisturbed by the storm until the chosen twelve spoke with a familiar wilderness sentiment: "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mark 4:38). Mark tells that Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind and the sea, prompting the question of the disciples, asked in obvious awe, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41). *This*, Mark is saying, was the power of God, of course, bringing deliverance to his chosen children in a new exodus.

Mark, not trusting us to draw the conclusion he wants to make obvious, in order to assure that we do not fail to understand, writes that immediately upon reaching the other side of the sea Jesus and the disciples were beset by a man tormented by unclean spirits, who identified themselves as "Legion." The unclean spirits, the enemy of the tortured man, were commanded by Jesus to depart from him, and were permitted to enter a herd of swine nearby. The swine rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and the waters closed over them. So the acts of God in the Old Testament pursue the reader into the New, and God is again revealed as the one whom the winds and water obey, and who destroys the enemies of his people.

It was God who met the needs of the Israelites, guiding and caring for them. The wondrous deliverance over the sea did not, however, shelter Israel from facing the difficulties of life. They were subject, as the Christian, to the same problems of cold and hunger, shelter and security. Israel was to be responsible, even for her decision to accept the role of God's chosen people, and all that that might entail. They, like we, are unwilling to accept the responsibility for the position in which they discovered themselves. They had come a long way, but their distance had simply thrust them into a dry desert, forbidding and unyielding, and within three short days they were complaining to Moses, "What

shall we drink?" (Ex. 15:24). It was then, at the spring of Marah, that God directed a tree branch be thrown into the water to sweeten its bitterness. The water at the frontier of trust often comes from a bitter spring, and we feel that it is surely undrinkable: God cannot expect us to sustain life with this which we find along the way — is there no Promised Land?

We accept the call, as did the Hebrews, to become part of Israel, the community of Christ, confident that having glimpsed the light of truth and promise Utopia is just around the corner, and our lives will become laden with meaning. Instead of beatific visions amidst Gothic spires that drug our sensibilities (a condition we gladly mistake for communion with the true God), or the overwhelming, spiritual presence of God, or the love and concern of fellow Christians for one another or ourselves, we find a dreadful building designed by a prosaic architect, a vacuum threatened with an implosion of meaninglessness, and demands from a bickering multitude to give, give, give, instead of receive. But when we accept God's love in its uninterrupted revelation, he shows us that the bitter water we must sometimes accept as necessary sustenance in our lives as his children is really the sweet, eternal water of life.

The grumbling of the Israelites diminished for the time, and travel went smoothly for a while. Discontent again erupted when the people cried to Moses because of the lack of food, and they yearned again for the bread and the savory pots of boiling meat they had enjoyed as slaves in Egypt. Israel had been called by God to be his free people. That freedom was to be freedom from the past, from all that she had been. The chosen ones were called to newness of life, cleansed from the past in their baptism in the water, resurrected, and offered a future as God's children, God's first-born son. They were asked to shed their past and all that it had meant to them, and God had promised them healing (Ex. 15:26), but their anxiety dragged them back into yesterday, the sepulcher of the past.

The call from God to his people has always been the same. Abraham had been called away from his past for a future that

God would bless and give to him. Even the Jews of New Testament times thought of baptism as a cleansing from the past and a raising to newness of life. When Israel was called from her bondage in Egypt, she was called to trust in God to give her life in whatever came to her. But when that promised fulfillment of life brought tenuous existence in a desert, largely barren of water and food, she became anxious and lost her trust that God's gift to her was life after all. Remembering the security of her day-to-day slavery in Egypt, all she could see around her, and even in the future, had the look of death. The Israelites longed for the past—the good old, comfortable, secure, *dead* past. Forgotten were the hardships and oppression. Forgotten were the humiliations and degradation they had endured as slaves. Only the pungent memory of pots of boiling meat lingered in their minds, and they groused and complained, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex. 16:3).

The weaknesses and failures of ancient Israel are readily apparent to us. The writer of Exodus spells them out lucidly, and we cannot but accept the fact that these people, miraculously removed from their life of slavery, were, to put it most kindly, somewhat ungrateful for the privilege of being God's chosen people. We cannot level our criticism, which has been perfected by historical hindsight, at ancient Israel without including ourselves in her midst. The Christian church, the new Israel, mars her exodus of deliverance with failure and weakness also.

Israel has always been subject to finitude, because she has always been constituted of finite creatures, unable to perceive clearly, or obey perfectly, the will of God. We cannot throw stones at Israel of old, because we reside in a shiny glass house which catches all the rays of light, enabling the world easily to observe that Israel still is unable to live a life reflecting her baptism, her cleansing from the past. Whatever reason prompts our casting ourselves into the Christian community, we, like Israel of old, cannot leave the past behind. We hear the call and come

running some Sunday morning, and go back to denying the dignity of our neighbor Monday morning. We say our only salvation lies in trusting the God we experience in the body of Christ, and find ourselves on a diet of milk and baked chicken to tame the ulcer we developed trying to secure our own lives. In the economic rat race, we lose at least one leg to stand on, and, like Ahab in *Moby Dick*, we stalk the seas, and double the watch, and leave others to drown in the wake of our own relentless pursuit of that which is the object of our vengeance. This is a phantom course we pursue — we are stalking our own past, and in our backward flight it is our own future that follows us and which we must finally turn to encounter. Men of iron will and unconquerable determination, like Ahab, are unable to prevent the inevitability of being swallowed up in their own death.

The echo of the triumphant song of Miriam which roused a chorus of cheers from the people as they stood by the sea of deliverance was lost in the reverberations of the chorus of Israelite complaints. "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea" (Ex. 15:21), had a different lyric a short time later: "Whine to the Lord, for he failed ingloriously; no food or water do we anywhere see."

When the people came to them murmuring, Moses and Aaron wearied of the chorus, and reminded the people that they were really murmuring against the Lord. It was not the call of Moses and Aaron the people had accepted, but that of God, and it was he to whom their complaints were in truth directed, and it was he who would answer them. The first story of God's feeding of the people in the wilderness is his answer.

Although the Israelites had murmured to Moses and Aaron, God answered them, telling Moses, "I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God'" (Ex. 16:12). In the evening the land was filled with quails, as God had promised. Their migrations still occur across the desolate land, reducing them to such a state of exhaustion that their capture is very easy.

The following morning, when the dew had been consumed by the hot desert sun, the earth lay before the people frosted with flakes of white. Having no experience with the natural phenomenon of the desert that had produced the wafers of honeylike substance from the tamarisk tree, the people asked, "What is it?" and were told by Moses it was bread from God.

They were commanded to gather a sufficient quantity for each household but were warned not to store any of it overnight. Futile warning! Those who tried to protect the morrow with an extra provision were repaid for their distrustful efforts with its spoilage. The only exception to this, which did not spoil, was the extra amount that the people were directed to gather on the sixth day to tide them over the Sabbath. Although the observance of the Sabbath had not become part of a law for the people as yet, a careful preparation for its observance has been placed here by an attentive hand.

The lesson of the manna is repeated in the New Testament, not only in the Lord's Prayer, which limits the petition for bread to a daily portion, but also in Jesus' admonition to be satisfied with the troubles encountered in each day. We borrow trouble from tomorrow because we are trying to secure the future, we are seeking guarantees for tomorrow. We look well beyond tomorrow and even seek security and preservation against "forever":

The simple wood casket, which for ages helped Christians lay their dead in the grave with dignity, is out of style. Decorated bronze tries to veil mortality, for the bronze has been guaranteed in full-color ads "never" to leak. People forget that *never* is a long, long time. Take the word seriously and you get a vision of some future age when our solar system is reduced to cosmic dust; presumably there will fly about in space a few million bronze coffins, still not leaking.<sup>4</sup>

Each day is a gift from God, and God has promised the ingredients necessary for life, if we accept them as such in that day. Each moment, new, never a repetition of another, offers each

living person the land of beginning again, and we are free people only when we recognize this possibility. When we become aware that our every breath is subject to God's charity and not our own control, our recognition illuminates the fact of our dependence on him. Our dependence, perhaps unrecognized, has shadowed our entire past, and calls us to trust that the future to which we are called opens before us as the gift of a trustworthy God.

God has called Israel to leave the past behind and turn to the future. No, God has really called us farther than that, to a place more difficult to reach—the present. We can hide from life as effectively in the future as in the past. Waiting to live is as fatal as living only in memories. It is in the *now* that we receive the precious gift of life, and it can only be used in the now. A ticket valid for life is stamped “good in the present only.”

Many nations have been accused of living in the past, but we Americans are surely more guilty of rushing into the future, without a single discerning glance at the path along the way—a path landmarked by children's laughter, timorous smiles left frozen on the face of a would-be friend, the silent moment of slumbering beauty blanketing a lawn of cool green awaiting the first rays of the morning sun to dry its early shower of wet jewels—but then, there are the morning headlines to be snatched from the still wet grass, the hurried cup of instant coffee to be drunk, followed by the instant dash to the office, where we strive today to lay up manna for tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. We find ourselves scrambling at such dead heat after the bread necessary for existence, we totally lose sight of that which we have been told by God. There is only one source of the bread necessary for life: “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). Hunger and thirst are the companions of him who believes in himself and his self-sufficiency—only trust and dependence on God can satiate them.

As the angels ministered to Jesus when he came up out of the waters of the Jordan and spent his forty days in the wilderness being tested, the “food from heaven” came also for the Hebrews.

That the people would remember God as the source of life for them, Moses was commanded to preserve an individual daily portion of the manna to be kept throughout their generations, as an embodiment to the people of the truth of their relationship to God. It was he who had provided their sustenance and it shall ever be: "His mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Ps. 100:5, KJV).

Time stretched out, and life in the wilderness gradually became a yearning for the life that had gone before. Even before the people had reached "the mountain" of God, their song of praise had been altered to a song of complaint. The love of God manifested clearly in his acts had to be held before the people by a steadfast Moses, a man of singularly inexhaustible patience. He must have had to remind himself constantly of the immediate past experience of his people in order to suffer their sullen ingratitude. They had never experienced themselves as anything but the property of men who ordered their lives in almost every way. Their very presence together as a people, unmediated by the chains of bondage, was a new and terrifying experience.

Israel was a newborn child delivered into the strange new world of the wilderness, lustily crying for food, unable to focus clearly on the life surrounding her and unable to care for herself. The Israelites were fed the "bread from heaven" the forty years they spent in the wilderness. For the satisfaction of their physical needs they were entirely dependent on God, and would surely have perished by thirst and hunger had not his goodness intervened. Removed from the complexities of Egyptian economy and agriculture, described in some detail in the earlier story of Joseph and the years of famine against which he waged so successful a battle, the Israelites were less able to disregard the hand of God as their provider.

The complexities of modern society are as deceiving as those of Egypt. I buy a standing rib roast, cut to my specifications, ready-prepared, fresh-frozen vegetables, and packaged ice cream at the supermarket, without bothering to trace back to the "hand of God" as the source of material provision. Such a tracing would

take some doing. First, I would go to the warehouse of the wholesaler, then the offices of the distributor, thence to the magnificently complicated food processing plant, and if my diligence and imagination did not expire, I would eventually arrive at a supermechanized farm, ably run, at surface glance, with tractors, combines, harvesters, automatic cattle feeders, and milking machines, without any visible assistance from God, who receives only an occasional appeal to administer the executive affairs of the weather-processing plant with more care.

God has become rather like Second Cousin George, twice removed, to whom we used to be rather close. Good old Cousin George—we used to exchange letters frequently when we were younger. The letters gradually dwindled to an annual Christmas card, but he was faithful about the cards and kept us accurately informed as to his general well-being and whereabouts. Then, somehow, we moved two or three times ourselves, and we lost complete touch with good old Cousin George, until one morning in a strange town we pick up a newspaper and read that our good old Cousin George has died. This knowledge brings a painful stab of memory. We used to be so close. How did we ever get so out of touch?

But then, when we were younger, we used to be closer to God, a feeling fostered, no doubt, by our parents' blanket use of his name to answer all those unanswerable questions we asked. "Mommy, what makes the grass green?" Vague recollections of biological explanations stir up under the dust of neglect such words as "osmosis" and something called "chlorophyll," and presently the answer is formed, "Because God made it that way." This answer clocks up a lot of mileage before the child is educated, and the gullible child finds himself surrounded by a world of wondrous things in his four-year-old sight made up entirely by "God." Of course, each birthday finds him less susceptible to this handy little all-purpose answer, and sometime during his sixth year he challenges the answer out of his own experience and states emphatically that God certainly didn't make the flowers in the side yard. His explanation is ready and undeniably true: "I was with

you when you bought the bulbs at the store, and I dug the holes myself! " The market place and the labor of one's own hands increasingly widen the distance between the wonder of God's world and our awareness of our dependence.

Now it is somewhat easier to regard God as the source of life when one is able to clear away the throb of the engines and sources of power which never leave a quiet spot in the world. But this is no guarantee. Having returned to the source, we come to regard the source as simply the provider of bread and water, and look elsewhere for the meaning of life. So John records, concerning the multitudes who followed Jesus after the feeding of the five thousand. (John 6:1-14.) They did not want the gift that Jesus had to give: "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). The crowds sought only the bread with which they had been filled. They misunderstood the significance of the gift. In Christ, God had offered them life, the true manna. The Hebrews of old were offered this gift, the gift of life as a people living in freedom from the purposes and goals of the world, living in trust with God, shedding the patterns of the past and refusing a future composed of material dreams of national glory and splendor. Like the multitudes who sought to take Jesus by force and make him their king, the Hebrews of old did not distinguish between the perishable food that satisfies hunger and the food of life. But there is evidence that the early Christians understood:

The ruler of this world wants to take me captive and destroy my purpose toward God. So let none of you who are present help him. Take my side, that is, God's instead. Do not talk Jesus Christ, and desire the world. Envy must not live among you. . . . My love has been crucified, and there is no material passion in me, but living water, speaking within me, saying to me from within, "Come to the Father." I do not enjoy perishable food or the pleasures of this life. I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and for drink I want his blood, which is immortal love. (Ignatius' letter to the Romans, 7:1-3.)

God's bread from heaven is the Word of truth which teaches us the meaning of life, a meaning unfolded only when we recognize our dependence on him for fulfillment of the spaces within ourselves emptied of self-sufficiency, self-pride, self-concern, self-glory. Childbirth was upon the Hebrews, but they refused to come to life as offered by God. Their meager trust dissolved their life into an existence motivated by self-concern and disobedience.

## VI

### *You Call This Living?*

(Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:1-13)

The refrain of discontent again broke out among the people, and this time they sought proof from God of his good intentions toward them, doubting his continuing grace. Continuous seeking for "proof" of God's intentions is rather like hiring someone to keep tabs on a loved one to be sure the loved one does not stray, which will in no wise "prove" one trustworthy, even though he is never, over a long period, found guilty of behavior indicating otherwise. The Israelites demanded proof of God's intentions over and over, only to doubt his trustworthiness in any future situation.

They cried longingly for the restoration of material assurance such as they had had in Egypt — the wells of water conveniently near permanent places of dwelling, at least the relative assurance of a food supply for the sustenance of their families, even though they were at all times completely in the power of Egypt. They had been, however, an economic asset to the wealth of Egypt, and thus had within their possession a bargaining strength of sorts. They desired a stable situation of unchanging circumstances — but the best place to find that is in the grave. History, personal or national, cannot be coaxed into the static disposition of a deep-freeze. The future keeps coming to one, and that future brings change.

The Israelites did not want change. They wanted only the re-establishment of their old way of understanding life. They pined for the stagnant quality of slavery — an unthinking response to

an unchanging pattern, unmarred by the future. Here, in the vastness of an unfamiliar wilderness, old responses were useless, the past was irretrievable, and each day brought fresh hazards to their continued existence. They spent their days running to Moses with a triple-A priority requisition for some substance to take the risk out of life.

"Why do you put the Lord to the proof?" Moses asked. What was sought from God? What ingredient did they request as an addition to life to pull together and hold together every way of understanding that had been theirs and had now been shattered beyond repair? God had called them to be born again, and instead of birth, it was death they apprehended. But birth must be preceded by death, death to a former state, whether it is the death of the seed which issues in the bud, or the death of the bud which becomes the blossom. There is only one lasting ingredient in life, one thing that doesn't change—and that is change itself. Rivers form and change constantly as they wend their way to sea, land erodes, animals procreate and die, vegetation rots.

Sometimes it seems the most difficult thing in life to obtain is the glue to hold it together. Like a rotting, leaking vessel, it keeps falling apart despite our frantic efforts to plug up the holes and repair the breaks in the surface which continue to let the waters of insecurity lap hungrily at our feet.

Paint chips and wears away; floors become scratched and scarred; the springs in the couch sag; the battery wears out in the car; the TV tubes give up one by one; the office equipment and machines need repair or become ancient and obsolete—and competition demands their replacement; the washer shudders one final time and gives up the ghost forever; the tires on the car wear down to a disaster-inviting surface of smooth rubber; our shoes wear out; our clothes fray and fade and tear; our teeth begin to go—one at a time; our glasses get a little stronger, and it takes a little longer to fill in the wrinkles with make-up; our hair disappears, and so does our waistline—and sometimes it seems life is composed of one long, frantic scramble just to keep it patched together.

Leo Auffmann in Ray Bradbury's delightful book *Dandelion Wine* decided to make a Happiness Machine—a contraption that in spite of wet feet, sinus trouble, rumpled beds, and those three-in-the-morning hours when monsters eat your soul, would manufacture happiness—and because happiness is a bright thing, he decided to paint the machine orange.

Working on it involved Leo to such an extent that he ceased being father and husband, and its completion was responsible for the sobs of his son, Saul, waking the household in the middle of the night. It was finally too much for Lena, his wife, and she packed to leave, agreeing only to try the machine out once, just to be fair. As Leo and the children gathered around, they heard at first only her “oh’s” and “ah’s,” but presently they heard weeping. Leo couldn’t believe it—first Saul, then Lena. What was wrong with his Happiness Machine?

“Oh it’s the saddest thing in the world—” she wailed. “I feel awful, terrible.” She climbed out through the door. “First, there was Paris. . .”

“What’s wrong with Paris?”

“I never even *thought* of being in Paris in my life. But now you got me thinking: Paris! So suddenly I want to be in Paris and I know I’m not!”

“It’s almost as good, this machine.”

“No. Sitting in there, I knew. I thought, it’s not real!”

. . . . .

“You had me dancing. We haven’t danced in twenty years.”

“I’ll take you dancing tomorrow night!”

“No, no! It’s not important, it *shouldn’t* be important. But the machine says it’s important! So I believe! It’ll be all right, Leo, after I cry some more.”

“What else?”

“What else? The machine says, ‘You’re young.’ I’m not. It lies, that sadness Machine!”<sup>5</sup>

When Lena finally quieted, she told Leo he had done two things he never should have done: he had made quick things go

slow and stay around, and had brought faraway things to their own back yard where they didn't belong. Fortunately for the Auffmanns, the machine caught fire and burned, unfortunately taking the garage with it. But they were rid of the temptation to dream about what life might be like in another place, at another time, under other circumstances—and could go back to living. Leo, a wiser man from the experience, finally decided that his family was the real happiness machine, and he turned his loving attention back to his wife and children, expending his energy to make the machine run smoothly, eliminating friction here, making a minor adjustment there, busy among all the warm, wonderful, infinitely delicate, forever mysterious, and ever-moving parts.

Where Leo sought to preserve beauty and delight from change, he discovered that only life experienced through the colorful prism of change can have either beauty or delight. Only that which is dead does not change. *Nothing* stays the same. Not even love—for our love for God and family and fellow man changes in texture from day to day, subtly altered by our environment and growth, or lack of same. According to the magnitude of our efforts to escape the reality of life, all of us try to manufacture a happiness machine for our lives, some one way, and some another.

The Israelites, like Leo, desired a preservation of unreality—a return to the good old days of the past. The memory of their life in Egypt was their “happiness machine.” The future lay around them clothed in the blankness of the wilderness, unbeckoning and frightening, but God called this future to which the Israelites had been called, and which they must reach by way of living in the present, Life. They were given the freedom to accept it as such or not—very much as men are given, without consultation as to their preference, the face they wear. The expression they put on it is left up to them.

They had been called to trust God to lead them safely from Egypt, through the sundry perils of the wilderness, to a Land of

Promise, a life destined to belong to them. Anxiety concerning their material welfare crowded trust to the periphery of consciousness, and its return to the center of life was dependent, in their minds, on the continuous sight of God's presence and intentions.

The exciting adventure of being God's chosen they coveted, but surely it could not mean this that had befallen them. The changes in their lives they had had in mind consisted of better hours and wages, overtime, accident and health insurance, automatic pay increases, social security, and old-age benefits. An occasional excursion into the wilderness for a religious festival, just to break the monotony of the daily round, would not have been unwelcome.

Some changes we do welcome — an exciting trip, a promotion, a new love. But to avoid others, we would gladly shed life like a snake shedding his outgrown skin. When faced with the dissolution of fortune, loss of family, diminishing of social prestige and community respect, the disruption of old standards and beliefs, we would without hesitation accept the advice of Job's wife and curse God and die, seeking somehow a refuge which would protect us from the acceptance of reality. We rely on the greed of power-happy politicians to leave us alone, free from the responsibility of formulating and running a Christian government, and on the acquisition of material goods to assure us of our individual worth, and at the last, on the skillful talent of the undertaker to convince us there is really no such thing as death.

Trees die, rocks crumble into sand, nations wax and wane, but we stand before God with the Israelites and put him to the proof, demanding a remedy for the ailing situation. When the Israelites cried to Moses, he turned to God with their complaints, stating that they were ready to stone him. Moses was told to take the rod with which he had struck the Nile and go to the rock at Horeb, and God said:

"Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place

Massah and Meribah, because of the faultfinding of the children of Israel, and because they put the Lord to the proof by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex. 17:6-7.)

The elixir for their thirst came from the rock before which God placed them. This is the rock that Paul calls "Christ" in his letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 10:4). Paul says this life-giving rock followed Israel through the wilderness. A similar account of the waters coming from the rock appears in Numbers, which I have included with this account, because the story in Numbers, while almost identical, is the basis for the denial to Moses to enter into the Promised Land. There is no sure way, either, to establish these as being identical stories as told by two different writers, or to determine if they are separate events occurring at different times, but they have been put together here because they are so similar that handling the story as it appears in the book of Numbers elsewhere would be largely a duplication.

There is no simple answer as to why the ban was put on Moses by God—the Scriptures are hazy at best—and many answers have been put forward by way of explanation. One of two is usually accepted: Moses and Aaron did not confine themselves to speaking to the rock (Num. 20:8), but struck it with the rod; or Moses struck the rock twice instead of once. Either answer is hypothetical. Perhaps the story, receiving its present form at a time long after the knowledge of Moses' death in the wilderness before the entry of Israel into the Promised Land, was already a part of the history of Israel, and the writer was endeavoring to explain why this great leader, who had so ably brought the people thus far, was denied the final victory.

Whatever the reason, the Scripture clearly makes the relationship of Moses and the people to God the focal point of the story. It was before this rock that the people stumbled in distrust and disobedience. This rock, which Paul calls Christ, which is to say "the stumbling-stone" (Rom. 9:32), is the same which Peter calls Christ when he speaks of the "stones that will make man stumble" (I Peter 2:8). Peter is quoting Isaiah:

“And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.” (Isa. 8:14-15.)

These early builders, called from their past to build God's church, rejected this stone, but it, rejected from the beginning, was the head of the corner (Ps. 118:22-23; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; I Peter 2:6-7), the sure foundation on which the entire building must rest. Without this cornerstone, there is no structure.

The structure designed by God was not one the Jews wanted to build. They rejected the plans and proposed plans of their own. They refused to surrender to God's love and accept their lives, in dependence, from him. But we always refuse to surrender to God's love, which requires of us the sacrifice of our own way and blesses us with gifts we want no part of: forgiveness in place of justification; repentance in place of repressed memory of our wrongs; faith in God in place of self-sufficiency; day-to-day trust in the goodness of God rather than in an infallible “sign”; finitude in place of omniscience. All of our lives, including the sorrows and uncertainty, are the gift of God's love. If we believe truly that God works all things together for our good, then we usually find our good is not that which we ourselves would have chosen.

When Paul spoke of Christ as the Rock which followed Israel, he was not speaking of some mystical magic perpetrated by God. He was speaking of the confrontation of God with the people, giving them the opportunity of a new understanding of themselves. They were given in their situation in the wilderness the opportunity to understand themselves as a people who were unable to secure their own lives, but must depend upon the freely given grace of God for life. This is the revelation God has given in Jesus Christ — an opportunity to understand ourselves as creatures who are in no way able to save ourselves, but must accept the gift of salvation from God as a gift freely offered, and in no way dependent upon any merit in ourselves.

The memory of Egypt continued to haunt the Israelites, however, and they did not believe God could use the unpromising materials in the wilderness for the construction of a building worth wasting their labor on. Had God played them for the fool? Had he filled their heads with vibrant visions and foolish dreams of a Promised Land merely to destroy them? No, man is himself the fool — and Israel was a dreamless one, substituting memories for dreams.

We, as a part of Israel, dwell in the prison of old longings unsatisfied, old plans unfulfilled, old hurts unavenged. We burden ourselves with a basket of broken fragments of the past, and at each bend in the road we dig through its moldering contents looking for the self that was and planned to be. But God's gift of new life comes in the "is" and not in the "should have been."

We scrutinize the blank canvas of the future and it looks like a forbidding wilderness, and we see only emptiness in a life that we know will not give answers to *our* questions, fulfillment to *our* plans, justification to the self we pretend is *our* self — for God loves a self other than the one we pretend to be. He reveals in the Christ, the Rock, the truth about life which we painstakingly ignore — our total dependence on God for fulfillment. We deny the dreams of promise as meaningless fantasy and immerse ourselves in a stagnant pool of the past, trying to build a foolproof Happiness Machine.

## VII

### *At the Foot of the Mountain*

(Ex. 17:8 to 20:20)

Israel was the victor in a brief battle with the fierce desert tribe of Amalek. Her military leader in this skirmish was a hitherto unmentioned young man named Joshua. After the battle there was a civil reorganization under the guidance of Jethro, relieving Moses of the impossible task of judging every dispute which arose among the people. Then, at last, the sojourn of the chosen brought them to "the mountain" and the giving of the law. The "sign" (Ex. 3:12) which God had promised Moses as his guarantee of having done that which was commanded of him had now been fulfilled. Here at last were the chosen people, released from the gods of Egypt and safely delivered to "the mountain." Moses received God's assurance, thereby, that his will had been consummated.

Henceforth it would rest with the people as to the disposition of their relationship to God. They would be directly and personally responsible to God for the fulfillment of his command. As the Hebrews become here personally responsible to God, so I too find here that first instance of God addressing me personally. Traditionally the Hebrew religion has not been assumed to have become centered on the individual until postexilic times, but I, as an individual, cannot here escape God's "thou" in his commandments.

The deliverance of Israel to this place was to culminate in the affirmation of God's perpetual grace to a people who would bind their lives to him — God and Israel, the divine-human encounter,

the I and Thou, the indissoluble tension of life at the foot of the mountain. We, with the Israelites, live in the shadow of "the mountain of God." God's otherness is breath-takingly described by his appearance to Moses and the people. Moses had been exhorted by God to fence the mountain so that the priests and people might not mistakenly approach too near God and be destroyed. He who would lay hold on God as a personal possession works his own destruction. Yet God, who is wholly other, not man, not any part of the creation, draws near to man. God came down upon Mt. Sinai to the people who were gathered in its shadow. God, who has shown himself more powerful than the self-appointed deities of men to save and deliver them from death, draws himself near to man. The poetic necessity of describing God's visit to Israel results in an awesome picture of fire, smoke, earthquake, and thunder.

The Ten Commandments, committed to tablets at a later time, were here spoken directly to Moses in the hearing of the people, in order, the writer states (ch. 19:9), that the people might thereafter place their confidence in Moses. All other laws governing the life of the people at this time came to the people indirectly through Moses. The sheer force of length and detail of the law<sup>6</sup> is disturbing to the New Testament Protestant, who reads with bewilderment rules and regulations set over the lives of the Hebrew people. Bewilderment is also the price of intensive study of the New Testament and its attitudes toward the law. Jesus and Paul both appear determined to do away with the law, and at the same time, in a way we find difficult to understand, to retain it. If we study the later history of the church, we run full tilt into the Reformation and find the battle being fought again concerning the law and its place in our lives. Throughout the history of Israel, and on into the New Testament period, the people's understanding of their relationship to God is split and goes in separate directions, resulting finally in the New Testament conflicts between Paul and the Judaizers.

From the very beginning, there were men who held the law in higher esteem than their relationship to God, who had given the

law. The prophets, like Paul, could do nothing with such an understanding but oppose it. The war between Judaism (as it developed after the exile into Babylon) and Christianity (as it is presented in the New Testament before it had become inextricably saturated with Greek thought) has been too ably fought by others to warrant a duplication here. One has only to read Paul's letters, or the works of Luther and Calvin, to be convinced beyond any doubt that there is no place whatsoever in our faith for the idea that a man can gain *any* advantage in God's sight by works of the law or moral fulfillment of any ethical standard. "None is righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10.)

What, then, are we to do with the law? Has it any function in our lives, or may we simply ignore it? Even if we approach the whole of the law with contemporary rationality, discarding the ceremonial and civil portions which we conceive as being anachronistic to our present culture, we are still faced with the Decalogue and the ethical impact of the New Testament, which have formed the backbone of civil law and ethical standards for all of Western culture.

Turning to the New Testament, we find the teachings of Jesus and the writings of Paul contradictory to traditional Judaism. Jesus preached obedience, but not to the formal authority of the law. In his use of the Old Testament, he clearly regards the ethical commands as the only ones binding on man; but with a sharpness that prompted the wonder of his fellow men at the ring of authority with which he spoke, he sets even those laws against one another, contrasting man's weakness under the law with God's will, until all law becomes a shambles. In the end, Jesus leaves us with only our own discernment in the application of the ethical demands upon us. Each in his own way must find the meaning of and obey the only commandment—the commandment of love—and where the specific ethical commands in Scripture cut across the command of love, man must choose God and not formal rules and regulations.

This leaves us adrift without rudder or sail, in an unstable, leaky boat, on a vast sea of unstructured behavior patterns—and leaves

us with the frightening discovery that God's requirements for our lives can only be determined by our own experience. We are not required by God *to do something* obedient, but *to be someone* obedient. This completely eliminates inaction and indecision as being ways of escaping God's claim. To do nothing, when God's claim of love is on us, is, under Jesus' teaching, the equivalent of doing evil. We cannot choose neutrality—we must decide between the only two possibilities before us, to obey God or disobey God with our life—and we can have no claim on God for having obeyed a command of ethical authority which decides for us what our actions should be. Neutrality is simply a cocoon into which we crawl to escape being responsible for making a choice. We must, however, decide God's will in each particular situation. I must ever decide who I am—I am either one who trusts in God, or I am one who trusts in something else.

The very standards that have shaped my past have hereby been called into question. The moment of decision contains in it all that is necessary for my decision as I stand before God and his claim on my life. Whatever I decide, it must be my whole self that enters into the decision, and not a separate, rational bowing before the formal authority of regulation. Nothing from my past is available that can make that decision for me—I must decide NOW. And when I am a rule-guided individual, I have simply denied both my freedom and my responsibility.

We are usually so caught up in our complicated standards, our millions of "do's" and "don'ts," that we completely transform the role the law has in our lives, and strive to build character on the strength of it. We regard character development as a judge utilizes precedent in law—we use yesterday's choices as today's excuse. The fact, however, that I chose to do thus-and-so yesterday, for whatever reason, in no way prejudices my actions today—and I am responsible for both choices.

I may have been prejudiced against equality for Negroes, or Mexicans, or the Chinese yesterday, because I was reared that way, and that's the way I have always been. Therefore—therefore what? I have no choice? But what is it that blocks my free-

dom of choice today, except my own stubborn will? Because I *was* then, *must I be*? I have let the past become a dictator. There is nothing that gives my past the authority to govern my present or future behavior. I can make a wholly new choice—I can reverse my conscious attitude on racial prejudice simply by exercising my freedom of choice, if I am willing to accept the responsibility for changing.

Past conditioning cannot be a living factor in the present, overshadowing my choices, unless I choose to let it. We demand to be given the privilege of freedom as long as we are also allowed at any time to deny that freedom by escaping into a predetermined pattern of behavior. We label that pattern “ego”—and are able to release ourselves from responsibility by a semantic gymnastic.

When we turn to the New Testament to discover Jesus’ understanding of the law, we find ourselves faced with a decision. If we decide to accept Jesus’ attitude toward ethical authority as we find it, we must then accept his understanding that ethical law is something outside oneself, and adherence to it is simply adherence to a point of view and not obedience to God’s claim on one’s life. The contrast of the “old” with the “new” in the collection of Jesus’ teaching commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, preaches that the claim on man is for *complete* obedience to the will of God. He who would not kill, thereby obeying the law, and yet is angry with his brother, has obeyed only the visible regulation. He who is kind only to loved ones has not loved; he who avenges injustice has not understood that rejection of injustice means there can be no retaliation. Jesus brings the demand of law into direct conflict with the demand of God.

We, with the Pharisees, loudly disclaim such a nebulous ordering of life, because it gives us no pattern for security at all, and we seek desperately to patch up the law so that we may once again lean comfortably against a foolproof system. We choose Judaistic legalism instead of Christian freedom and responsibility as Paul understood it, and gloss over the soul-shaking impact of the Reformation. What we have not understood is that there can be no such concept as a “good necessity,” because goodness ac-

cording to the understanding of the Bible, resides in the freedom from necessity. If goodness were something which could be enforced, it would then cease altogether to be goodness.

Again we ask the question, what are we to do with the law? Just for a daring moment, let's pretend we agree with Paul. If we accept his understanding of the law in man's life, how do we regard its function? In the first place, Paul certainly believed that the law was an instrument given of God. But as I look at the law as I find it in the Bible, even the Ten Commandments appear as laws suitable, for the most part, for the ancient world. Yet modern psychiatry tells me I am a guilty person, and I am guilty because I know myself as one who has done violence to myself and as one who has failed to meet the needs of my fellow man. Even relegating the Ten Commandments to the ancient world does not absolve me from God's "Thou!"

To increase my discomfort, I hear Paul saying, "For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15), and yet, "No human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Well, if I cannot do anything in or through the law, yet the law is that which condemns me, why was the law given? And how can it be an instrument of God's grace? Why, simply by revealing to me who I am. Knowing the law, I know myself as one who cannot keep the law. I needn't be a student of the law to discover this. Paul says I need only be told, "You shall not covet," to discover I am a person who covets! (Rom. 7:7.)

Knowing I am unable to keep the law, I am a person without hope, save for God's mercy on which I must throw myself without recourse. There can be no appeal for me, since having failed to keep any one facet of the law, I have failed completely.

Well now, at this point, I'm likely to take a second look at myself and retreat into the idea that surely God is not going to be so hard on me. He knows what it is to be human, and he surely will not condemn me when I have done the best I can. I am, after all, just about as good as the next fellow, and live a pretty good

life, considering all I have to put up with. As a matter of fact, I think I might say with Paul, "I have lived as a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). That is, I have been an upstanding member of my community, a staunch supporter of the church, a tither, and I have certainly been right there at that church every time the doors were opened! But then, I feel a cold chill of fear settle down on my heart when I recall those uncompromising words of Jesus, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48)!

I cannot deny it—I stand condemned by the law at every hand. As I read and study even the seemingly unsophisticated simplicity of the Ten Commandments, I know myself to be guilty, which is exactly what God intended I should know. Yet, I need not fear, because God has told me (as soon as I know thoroughly enough that I cannot use the law as a buffer between myself and an encounter with him) that I am safe—I need not seek self-justification, because he has already accepted me as I am.

The law always stands outside myself, showing me the kind of person I am. Each commandment can reveal to me the reality of myself. The First Commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before me," and I know perfectly well I have given many things prior place. I have given precedence to systems and plans. I have been more concerned with power, prestige, financial empire, and social position, than I have with God. I have built my life around the plan of the world in order to infuse that life with meaning. Yet, God has said, "I, and I alone, can give meaning to life." Other cultures have provided gods for each need of man, but Israel's God is sufficient for every need. I stand condemned!

The Second Commandment tells me I must not bow down and serve graven images, which displace God from centrality. Yet, I have allowed all manner of symbols to replace him in my life. I have gloried in the symbol of power as it is evidenced in my control over other lives. I have received with pleasure men's deference, which is the symbol of human esteem. I have paraded, albeit in all modesty, my home, my car, my clothes, and were I fortunate enough to be some others I know, I could have included a swim-

ming pool, a yacht, and a superior education in my image (i.e., trophy) collection.

I have served these images by sacrificing my own personality and the dignity of my fellow man to achieve their acquisition. I have wasted precious energy, time, and intelligence acquiring them. They have been the end of every means. But God has rendered meaningless the very symbols I have worked so hard to accumulate, and the sweet taste of acquisition has melted away, leaving the acrid taste of corruption and emptiness, and perhaps too late I discover I have passed on to my children my own empty images of success. My false gods, thrust upon my children, and through them upon their children, have emptied their lives also. God's love reaches out but cannot touch me, because I have shut the door on it and am unwilling to believe that he, and he alone, can give life meaning and fulfillment. God's very jealousy integrates life—he demands all, making life a whole. Nothing of myself is to be withheld from him. I stand condemned!

The Third Commandment warns me that I must not call myself a Christian for some purpose of my own. Yet, I have used my church membership to notify my community of my respectability and superior moral nature. My hypocritical use of the name "Christian" has left me without peace. I pay in conflict and guilt. I stand condemned!

When I reach the Fourth Commandment, I breathe a little sigh of relief and am tempted to pass it over, remembering Calvin's reassurance that the Christian community celebrates the first day of the week and not the last. The Sabbath has been replaced by the resurrection morning. And yet, possibly I have understood this commandment least of all. In the first place, it is different from the others. It tells me to "remember" the Sabbath, as if it were some part of the unremembered beginning, and when I come as near the beginning as I am able, I find mention of the Sabbath in the Creation story. Granting the poetic structure of this story, still I wonder what this writer was thinking when he wrote the Sabbath right into the creation of my world? If I follow through the meaning of the Sabbath as it appears in

the Creation story, however, I find that I am to set aside one day in seven, uncomplicated by my competitive place in the world of work and social order, for the sake of remembering who I am. My "work" tempts me to believe that my salvation is effected through it — so I must on this day deny the efficacy of my own ability to accomplish my justification.

I am created to be God's own child, that I might live in harmonious relationship to him and my fellow man in the world in which I have been placed. God's "rest" was, according to Genesis, a "given" of the creation. It was the completion, the climax of God's work — it was the goodness of all his work. When the six days of labor were added together, their sum totaled the loving relationship between God and his creation. Whether I call it the Sabbath or Sunday, this one day I am commanded to withdraw from my work in the world to remember paradise. I stand condemned!

The rest of the commandments are perhaps less subtle, but no less condemning. My relationship to my parents has been marred by resentment and selfishness.

I have killed my fellow man with hatred — he is a dead weight at the bottom of my heart. He does not live in my sight as one of God's loved ones.

I have regarded with favor and wonder that one who is not my marriage partner, and dreamed of life with another as more exciting and satisfying, thus despising my present God-given life.

I believe I am safe with the Eighth Commandment, until I realize that God has left me in a complete quandary by its very brevity. If he had said, "You shall not steal money," I would have fared decently. I almost never steal money from anyone, that is, if you don't charge me with the inadequate wages I pay those who work for me, or some equally irrelevant triviality. Of course, there are many things besides money which I steal. I steal time, energy, and intelligence from my boss; I steal interest and concern, which are theirs by birthright, from my children; I steal energy and well-being from my husband, and reputation from my neighbor. I stand condemned!

And at the last, I have gossiped and belittled my neighbor, and longed with envy for those things he possesses that I have been denied.

So, in the long run, the law, instead of providing me with a way of life I can follow without personal responsibility, earning at the same time my own salvation, has revealed to me my true nature, and my estranged relationship to God and my fellow man. I am not that which I ought by law to be. And if I have labored anxiously to fulfill the law myself, I have been tempted to do so by the image of the "should be" in the law, forgetting that the "should be," the wholeness of life, is a gift from God, not a human achievement, and I am striving after the law for the image that is lost. The law is God's gift of grace opening the possibility of a new understanding of myself.

If I strive to use the negative concept of the law as a means of self-justification, I am equally in peril. Denial of that which I believe separates me from God will not claim a blessing from him and restore our lost relationship. I cannot say to myself, "Do not dance, and be saved; do not smoke, and be saved; do not drink, and be saved; do not play cards, and be saved." Neither the positive act nor the denial of what I regard as evil can be construed as making me good. They have nothing to do with my salvation. I cannot make my life whole and full of God's joy by positive acts of kindness and love, nor by acts of self-denial. Authentic life cannot become my possession through my own power. I cannot acquire it by enslavement to the visible law.

The thunderings and lightnings, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking have caused me, standing in the midst of the congregation of Israel, to be afraid and tremble. We, the Israel of God, stand afar off in the shadow of the mountain. The law has fulfilled its function. We stand condemned! We cannot lift ourselves up or reach out and lay a claim on God. We stand, begging Moses to intercede, and cry across the centuries with Paul: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

God sends the answer through Moses. He has had it waiting

for us from the beginning. We had not ears to hear until we knew ourselves to be condemned and were forced to stretch out our empty lives before him. Moses consoles the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin" (Ex. 20:20).

The law is God's gift of authentication. Through it we know who we are and who God is. Sin is removed from us when we recognize the reality of God and know that it is he who has delivered us from the death of the past and offered us his love by giving us the future. If we have fear of him, we understand the power of truth and reality in our lives. We recognize him as the only source of meaning, and stand before him in moral unworthiness and dependence on his forgiveness and love.

Our fear is the fear of the unknown—that which would change us, alter our lives in such a way that we could not undo the change. If, for example, the unborn child were for an instant to have a glimpse of what his new existence after birth was to be like, he might, if the possibility were open to him, reject in fear his birth as the instrument of death. The involuntary reflex of breathing must begin to function immediately without previous practice. Where food intake had previously been automatically forthcoming with need, now he must decide when he needs food and make some sign to those in charge of him. When the food is offered, effort must accompany its intake.

Fortunately for the human race, those things necessary for the sustenance of life in the early months are instinctual, and provided, with a reasonable amount of concern, by that much-put-upon breed known as parents. Breathing, from the inception of that first angry inflation of inexperienced lungs, is a matter not requiring thought for its continuation. Nursing appears to be a natural route to nourishment for a system accustomed to the effortless luxury of the umbilical cord. And so, in the end, life after birth loses much of its dread for a long time to come—until the demand of the Christ comes asking for a rebirth of spirit into truth and dependence.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus in the night to question some of his teachings, Jesus said to him, "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). To which Nicodemus replied: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4.) We stand before new birth with fear and hesitation, for to be born again is to throw away our whole lives, and put ourselves into God's hands.

If I respond to my fear of the unknown by being unwilling to cast myself into a future which I have not tried to secure by my own efforts, I refuse to give up my old self and let the past be the past. I hold the past artificially in my present life by continuing to evaluate it in terms of good and evil, truth and error, and seek to avenge what I consider "evil," and make the "good" a lasting quality. As long as I continue to worry over my past, I am not free for the future, because I hold the impression that the past may repeat itself—a situation which I must either covet or guard against. I have not been born again. The only way I can die to myself and make the past past is by repentance, that is, by changing my mind with regard to the past and repenting of what has been done or omitted there.

My repentance cannot be a superficial lip service to "I'm sorry." I cannot act like a small child who has been ordered by his mother to tell the neighbor child, "I'm sorry," because he has hit him in a fit of temper. I cannot yell belligerently, "I'm sorry!" and run off to nurse my resentment. Repentance means restitution, and if I am unable to make restitution for my past, I must turn my life in the future toward restitution to my fellow man for my loveless past. Moses was commanded,

"Say to the people of Israel, When a man or woman commits any of the sins that men commit by breaking faith with the Lord, and that person is guilty, he shall confess his sin which he has committed; and he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it, and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong." (Num. 5:6-7.)

Anyone who has ever gone to one he has hurt, begging forgiveness, and receiving it, has known the genuine miracle of the past being lifted off his shoulders by the restoration of the relationship.

Only through repentance can I experience forgiveness, and when forgiveness comes, freedom comes with it. God has said, "Come now, let us reason together . . . : though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." (Isa. 1:18.) With forgiveness the past slides inevitably behind me, and I am free to look to the future without looking through a filmy cloud spread over it from the past. At the moment of repentance God gives me a "now"—a real life, not one suspended ineffectually between the past and the future. By God's advent into my life with forgiveness, eternity cuts across time, and I experience the new life, the eternal life that the Christ has promised in his revelation.

Existence (life in lower case) has no "now," no eternity in it. Those who merely exist do so in a kind of limbo between past and future, only dimly aware of LIFE. They go on projecting the past into the future, *ad infinitum*. Only when I am able to shed the past by repenting of it—that is, by repenting of who I am—and receive God's forgiveness, do I receive God's gift of eternal life—a *now*.

The past can *never* be the future, and any relationship I have to the past that gives it the possibility of becoming future is not a real relationship, but a counterfeit one. We are always trying to be the people we were. We save concert programs and dance programs, yearbooks and pictures, bits of dried flowers and crumpled ribbon, but none of these can return the past as it was, or us to the person we were at ten, or fourteen, or twenty-seven. We are always the age we are now, and that one we were is dead. All life is dying each day to rise again to a new life. At midnight of the day I am thirty-four years, three months, and five days, I die to being thirty-four years, three months, and five days, and become another person who is thirty-four years, three

months, and six days — and I remain this through the eternity that will itself deliver me to thirty-four years, three months and one week.

Saving bits of the past is practicing a sort of magic, like a trick with mirrors — an attempt to capture the past and keep it locked up the same forever in old dresses or suits that don't fit, old shoes that are now too small, old letters and ticket stubs. But we cannot lock up the past to preserve it unchanged, and mirrored images are not reality. Even the past changes, or else it wouldn't be necessary every few years to rewrite our history books — and they would not emerge from the presses sounding as though they spoke of a past unrelated to the history books that we commit to obsolescence on the shelf.

Where is the child I was at nine — the hurt child, bitterly resentful that I had been punished by my father for something my brother had done? Is that child still here in my mind? my reactions? Is it that child, cradled tenderly in a little bed of resentment in my breast, who causes me to lash out defensively when I feel unjustly treated? But that child is dead — has been dead many, many years. Why do I let that dead child dictate my responses to those living around me, who are not my father, in a moment of mistaken anger? I am reliving the life of a dead child again and again. I am not nine, and as far as my present relationships are concerned, and my responsibility in them at this moment of decision before the truth of Christ, I was *never* nine years old. I am always just the age I am — any other pretense is a choice to avoid my freedom and responsibility. It is only when I free myself from past responses, allowing each moment to be a *real* moment, that I cease to give cognizance to an impossibility — that the past is not past, but a future possibility.

Our fear of God is the first step in the understanding of reality. All attempts to gain the world have proved a delusion, and we stand before God in the existential crisis of decision. In guilt we stand before the infinite obligation of perfection with only a finite capacity for fulfilling it. Nothing in this world can save us. We,

at the foot of the mountain, must decide who we are going to be. We stand in dreadful freedom, and weigh the possibility of backtracking through the wilderness and retreating across the sea to the slavery of the past. God will pursue, but he will not stop us. Only we can make the decision to terminate the flight into death.

## VIII

### *The Sacred Cow*

(Ex., chs. 24 to 40)

Moses assembled the people and told them all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances. Israel, after hearing God's words, unanimously declared, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex. 24:3).

Having received their commitment to the commandments, Moses wrote down all the words, after which he built an altar on which a burnt offering was made in praise to God, and a peace offering was made to celebrate fellowship with God. Half the blood of the offering he dashed against the altar.

Then, like a parent trying to stress the importance of some path his child has chosen, and the problem of responsibility which must be his, Moses took the Book of the Covenant, and this time read to the people what he had written there. His consciousness reminds one of the old saying:

Make every bargain clear and plain  
That none may afterwards complain.

He wanted no mistake or misunderstanding on their part about what they were doing. They would be unable later to say: "We just didn't realize what it meant to make a covenant with God. We didn't know that pledging obedience to God involved taking on such drastic implications for our lives. We did not understand that obedience meant total obedience."

Having been twice warned, so to speak, Israel again pledged herself to the covenant with the words, "All that the Lord has

spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). Moses took the remaining blood of the offering and threw it upon the people, declaring, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Ex. 24:8). The people, united with God in the covenant, became Israel, the church.

Moses and the elders ascended the mountain to partake of their first communion meal together in the presence of God. Following the meal, Moses was summoned by God to come up on the mountain alone. Joshua accompanied him part way, and the two of them were gone for forty days and forty nights, which is the Hebrew writer's way of saying that Moses was with God long enough to accomplish God's purpose.

The contemporary reader is likely to share the growing unrest displayed by the Israelites at the extensive delay of Moses' return. It certainly does seem like a long time when one, at this point, is thrust into the middle of the specifications delivered to Moses for the construction of the Tabernacle and its necessary furnishings. The Tabernacle, as it appears described in the Scriptures, never actually came into existence, and the plan that is set down was put there by later editors to conform, as closely as possible, to the Temple in Jerusalem as they knew it.

The tent of meeting, a less glamorous structure, but an eminently more practical one in a nomadic society, was also called the Tabernacle. It became the symbol of God's presence in their midst. It was the Tabernacle that John surely had in mind when he wrote the words, "The Word became flesh, and . . . [tabernacled] among us" (John 1:14). God dwelt in the Tabernacle in the midst of the people and shared their life in the wilderness, just as Christ dwelt among the people and shared their life with them. The Tabernacle of the Old Testament becomes the Logos of the New Testament—God's glory is visible in both. The dazzling cloud of light that covered the tent became the light to enlighten the world in the New Testament.

The furnishings for the tent, the Ark, table, and lamp, were all, in their way, symbols of God's perpetual presence with the peo-

ple, and the entire structure, including furnishings, was to be provided for from the gifts of the people. Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated as a priesthood for the purpose of caring for the Tabernacle and the worship of the people. When the instructions were completed, God presented Moses with the two tablets, traditionally believed to contain the Ten Commandments.

Meanwhile, however, the Israelites had become most impatient, and the rumor took hold in the camp that something must have happened to Moses. The people gathered around Aaron, who had been left as their leader, and demanded that he make gods to go before them. Again we find the Scriptural account painfully candid, and Aaron's weakness of character has not been white-washed, but exposed for all to see. Aaron was what a contemporary sociologist would label "other-directed," a person who conforms to the standards expected of him by others. He apparently made no effort to deter the people from worshipping idols, although he had, with the others, committed himself to obey the commandments which specifically forbade graven images. Complying with the pressure exerted by the people, he asked them to bring him their gold jewelry for this purpose. When it was received, he fashioned, with the aid of a graving tool, a calf. The people, seeing what he had made, declared, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (Ex. 32:4).

How quickly the eagle wings of God, which had delivered the people from bondage in Egypt, had been converted into the imaginary wings of human ingenuity! It had not been God, the people here declared, who had been their deliverer — it was they themselves, with their superior intelligence and powerful courage, who had effected the deliverance. Here was a god fashioned with their own hands before which they could fall down and worship. In all fairness to Aaron, he probably intended the calf to be a representation of God. At least, he built an altar before the calf and said to the people, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord" (Ex. 32:5).

It was the sound of the revelry at this feast, which we may presume was a pretty rowdy affair, that reached the ears of Moses

and Joshua as they descended the mountain the following day. Joshua thought what he heard was the sound of war, but Moses had been warned by God of the events that were transpiring in his absence. God had been very angry with Israel, and at first declared to Moses that he would disown them completely. The people were guilty of breaking the covenant practically before the blood was dry that had sealed it. At the first sign of anxiety after the departure of Moses, they hastened to find a visible manifestation to restore the feeling of security to them. God told Moses he would cast off Israel and use Moses alone to make a great nation.

Moses interceded for the people, declaring that Egypt would have the last laugh on the Hebrews and on God himself, if they were able to say that God had delivered Israel to the wilderness just in order to destroy her. Moses had been a witness to God's fearful wrath when he had dealt with Pharaoh, and he was anxious for the Israelites, knowing that God could utterly wipe them from the face of the earth if he chose to do so. They were a quarrelsome, stiff-necked lot, ungrateful and complaining, yet they were Moses' own people, for whom he had risked his life before Pharaoh, and he loved them as one can love only one's own people. God was persuaded by Moses to forgive them.

As they descended the mountain, Moses' stride must have been swift and purposeful. Having assured himself that the people were safe from God's wrath, he was now going to deal with them himself. As he approached the camp, he saw the golden calf with the altar erected before it. His recent tender concern for the safety of the people melted into a burning hot anger. At the foot of the mountain he lifted the tablets of God's words and dashed them to the ground, breaking them into pieces, as the people had broken and shattered their word to God. He stalked into the camp and, presumably too angry to speak, ground the calf to powder, scattered it on water, and forced the Israelites to drink it as a trial by ordeal.

He then turned his anger on Aaron, whom he had left in charge, and asked him whatever the people could have done to

him that he would lead them into such sin. Aaron, frightened by this aspect of Moses which he had never seen before, cringed before his fury and told a pathetic lie. He first reminded Moses of the people's weakness and evil, and then declared that when they had brought their gold to him demanding it be used to make gods for them, he had thrown it in the fire, and the calf had risen miraculously full-formed from the flames.

One can almost feel Moses' sickness of heart. Surrounded by these people, who had fallen from their covenant with God so soon after it had been consummated, he must have been wondering what under the blue sky was wrong with them. Had they heard nothing? Had they learned nothing from the events of the past few months? Did they not remember that the gods were once and for all reduced to a ludicrous impotence? Where in the world had their minds been while all of this had been going on? They had, apparently, learned nothing whatsoever from their own immediate past history. Obviously their minds had been "in the world," and it was the world—the life of the visible and tangible—that they trusted and believed could provide meaning and security for their lives.

How long ago now was it that all of this happened? Lest we launch a fresh argument among the scholars, which is most assuredly not our intention, let us just hasten to say that it was a long, long time ago, something like three thousand years. Yet, three thousand years' history appears to have made no more impression on man than a few months made on the Israelites. Man's memory is as faulty as ever. He has no clearer understanding of his situation than did these stiff-necked people in the wilderness. Man can learn facts, but seems devoid of the necessary facility for learning experiential principles. What shall it profit a man to learn all the facts and lose all the principles? Perhaps he learns facts so adeptly because they are useful in feeding his own overweening pride and ego, and convince him that he is capable of saving himself by his own hands.

Man still worships the "golden calf." We still cry "Make us gods that we can see and manage, and that we can trust to lead

us the way *we* want to go. Moses has disappeared on the mountain; Elijah is gone; Amos, Hosea, and Micah were an eloquent trio, but we didn't quite catch their message, and we don't know what has happened to them; even Isaiah and Jeremiah have left only dim footprints on the path of history. Yes, there was Jesus, but he too is gone. Now, will you please excuse me? I have a board meeting; we have a really terrific stock merger pending — it will make our concern the biggest in the field."

So we worship the golden calf, and as for all these who tried to lead us after God, we do not know what has become of them. Their words have left no permanent impression on our lives, and because they are all gone, and their physical presence cannot infuse our lives with meaning and security, we must find something that will take their place. The work of our hands shapes for us gods to lead us forward and save us from the wilderness that threatens to engulf us. We invest our gold, our time and energy, in the framing of that on which we can rely as the instrument of deliverance from meaninglessness.

Perhaps no time in the world has been more illustrative of this than now. This is the age of progress, an age that man has shaped with his own clever ingenuity upon the forge of industry. We have built bigger and better golden calves, believing we can beat a path to the gates of paradise with them.

When Columbus sailed the ocean blue, leaving the courts of Isabel, he was searching for a place with streets paved with gold — paradise itself, the goal of the Renaissance. The irreconcilable conflict between the Renaissance (the fashioning of a golden calf to end all golden calves) and the Reformation (the lost cry of Calvin and Luther for man to remember that there is really only one true God), became a tug of war in which the world is still engaged. The Renaissance fostered the idea that man could conquer every area of life, know all there is to be known, and control all life, including religion, by a discipline of rationality. The quest for superman was on the march. Man surrounded himself with the tools necessary for the conquest of the earth, ever seeking to improve them.

European man moved out from his continent and conquered India and much of Asia. Africa became a rich source of free labor in a world not yet dominated by its greatest invention, the machine. When the machine came, children were fed to it in the sweatshops of industry as a part of the menu of capitalistic enterprise, an enterprise augmented by the helpful work of Napoleon, whose dream of personal glory enabled him almost singlehandedly to smash feudalism in Western Europe.

The machine, just a tiny, noisy baby at its birth, was soon to grow into a great hungry, man-eating monster, a veritable sacred cow, to which man readily pledged his own enslavement. The Christian religion of the Middle Ages, useless to a new Europe, was replaced by human ingenuity—the golden machine—before which man built an altar and bowed down, saying: “Behold, there is your god, O Man, who has brought you up out of the land of slavery! It shall go before you and bring mankind back into the lost Garden of Paradise!”

The machine was a greedy monster, and soon a diet of children was insufficient—a richer, more varied diet was required for this fast-growing machine. Pure science was fed to it, after being converted into applied science, for easier digestibility and quicker conversion into energy in the blood stream of commerce and industry. The machine became flesh and dwelt among us as our savior.

The machine was certainly created in the image of man. It did for him what he had always had to do for himself. It pumped his water, cut his wood, spun his thread, and made his clothes. It worked his farms, transported him faster and more efficiently than his own legs could carry him, and to places his legs could not go. It made his world smaller and his universe larger.

But in the long run, instead of man's retaining his superior position as creator of the machine, and his creation's releasing him from the burdens of life, it added to them, for it became a willful, uncontrollable, insubordinate, overgrown delinquent which turned back on man and exacted his own life. Because it was able to work tirelessly, mechanically, without spiritual prob-

lems or breakdowns, it had increased efficiency to such a point that man, its creator, took on the appearance of a second-rate creature instead, and he had to scramble frantically to keep up with the god that was leading him forward. But then, the machine did not have to cope with emotions, was not bothered by the problems of love and hate, did not have to be responsible for itself in its relations to men or other machines. Eventually, man became the creature, dedicated to the worship of the machine, which kept promising him a *new* life. Man served it obediently, faithfully, and promptly. He became a zealous missionary and went forth into the world, preaching to all nations the gospel of salvation by the machine.

Man forgot that the greatest portion of his life had to be lived in the area of emotions, that he was responsible to God and his fellow man, and in imitating the machine he killed his real life. Man forgot, and tried to live in the world as if all others, as well as himself, were machines. He would not hear the words of life, and his past experience had taught him nothing, even though he had had three thousand more years to learn than did the Hebrews at Sinai.

Finally, in the twentieth century, man's tower of scientific industrialism was brushing the bottom of the clouds, and the future began coming up over the horizon in rosy expectation. But the rosy glow turned out to be the incandescent fire of World War I, which gave birth to a world such as man had never known, and with which he was unable to cope. He furiously put his ingenuity to work in the years between 1914 and 1960 to save him from himself — although Americans eventually called the enemy Russia, and Russia called it America.

The gods were put to work to achieve salvation from the so-called enemy, and the armaments race was on. Man has trusted in chariots and swords — of course, nowadays he calls them warships and intercontinental ballistic missiles. "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong." (Isa. 31:1.) Superiority in the armaments race

has become irrelevant, although man does not seem to have realized it. Man has now achieved the possibility of the total destruction of entire social and cultural communities which comprise our civilization. After total destruction — what next?

Moses told us; Elijah told us; Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah told us; certainly Jesus told us; what will it take really to tell *us* — the real-life enactment of Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*? Still nations scramble madly to achieve some sort of fictional, superior superiority, worshiping gods made by their own hands. Bombs are made to cover just a "little more" territory, missiles are made to hit a "little closer" to dead center, travel just a "little faster," and go just a "little farther." Anti-missiles are developed, then anti-anti-missiles, then anti-anti-anti-missiles! Thus we inch painfully up the ladder of military prowess in futile and immature competition. We have made the whole operation a sort of world olympics of armament superiority — and each day a new "world's record" is called to our attention, and war threatens to continue to be one of the principle by-products of the arts of peace.

Following World War II, the people of Germany and Japan were forced to rearm simply because the major Western powers have cynically regarded them as pawns to shift the balance of military might. They have not even been allowed to "learn their lesson"! Indeed, the only lesson they could possibly have learned was that when one lost a war fought in his own interests, in defeat he would simply have to use his might to support the military structure of his conquerors.

Western diplomacy has forced the newly freed colonial nations of the world to choose military alliance on one side or the other, or disapproved neutrality. Every aid we have offered the struggling nations of the world has had powerfully taut strings attached. Russia, no more generous or well-wishing than we, is at least more subtle. We have defended our clumsy diplomacy, however, with the somewhat beleaguered term of "honesty," complaining that our enemy has made gains by subterfuge. We have mistaken self-concern for honesty.

We have been told, as Israel of old, that we cannot live lives of lovelessness and self-concern. Moses' words to Aaron and the unfaithful Israelites are words that we should hear and heed: "Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me" (Ex. 32:26). Punishment by death was the penalty paid by those who were found guilty of breaking the covenant binding themselves to God as his people. Death is the penalty a man pays who chooses his own way over God's.

Cursed is the man who trusts in man  
and makes flesh his arm,  
whose heart turns way from the Lord.  
He is like a shrub in the desert,  
and shall not see any good come.  
He shall dwell in the parched places  
of the wilderness,  
in an uninhabited salt land.

(Jer. 17:5-6.)

For it is only in God that we can live, and when we trust him, opening our lives to the future, he gives us life—being. When we turn away from him for meaning in our lives, then all life becomes like a desert. Seeking our own way, God is nowhere to be found with his gift of life. We cannot infuse our way of life with God's presence.

I climb all the heights of darkness—  
Perhaps shall find him standing on the last height.  
He is not there—  
I go through the paths of the night;  
Perhaps at the end he will be awaiting me;  
There is no end to the darkness and he is not there.  
I sink, I drown in the darkness, and he will not hear me.

My heart knocks at my breast  
And struggles like a live soul in a dead body.  
My body is weighted with lead,  
It drags me down through the darkness.

I cannot undo the clasp of the clinging flesh,  
In the thick net of the senses I am bound,  
If I die utterly and go to the place of the dead,  
I shall not find him;  
Beyond death he will hide from me.

. . .

And my thoughts are poisons and arrows,  
And futility, like black magic, wounds his blessed image,  
And my heart in the darkness  
Is a three-tongued flame of despair, self-condemnation, and  
terror! <sup>7</sup>

This soul-rending description of life without God, which makes clear elsewhere that it is man who has driven God away, was written by an anonymous alcoholic, who ended his existence with suicide, but it is an accurate description of anyone's flight from God, whether the flight be into alcoholism, invalidism, martyrdomism, industrialism, capitalism, or militarism.

Moses, who took no refuge in any *thing* outside God, in his relationship to Israel is silhouetted against history, and the three roles he played in leading the people stand out sharply. He was prophet, leader, and judge. As a prophet it was necessary for him to perform in a far more active sense than the prophets of later Old Testament times, who generally took an "objective" stand outside the community, directing their prophecy to the community as something apart from themselves. They were not responsible to see that the community repented on the basis of their own prophetic preaching. Moses had to prophesy and then lead the people to obedience by his decisions, judging them himself. He lived in their midst and yet was responsible for their *keeping* the covenant, not merely hearing its terms.

As a leader of towering magnitude, he fused the mass of individual people together into a community whose cohesiveness stemmed from their God-centered orientation—an orientation molded by his own dynamic understanding and direction. He was so effective in his total dependence on God his own personality is blurred, and it comes into focus only when the direc-

tion of his entire life is considered. His narrowness of devotion to God and his keeping before the people a singleness of purpose, was eventually to be developed by the priests into the disquieting superiority with which Israel came to regard herself in the postexilic period. The priest-dominated people of the remnant which returned from Babylon were led to a profound misinterpretation of Moses' understanding, and, as a consequence, also of their own role in God's plan. They came, through their leaders, to have a fanatic regard for the outward observance of the law in its ritualistic and ceremonial aspects. Marriages made with foreign women were dissolved, and the women and children disowned and excluded from the community. Preservation of the "holiness" of the nation, which they understood as their own distinction meriting a special privileged regard from God, assumed the proportion of superstition.

Israel, the community of God, which came into being by a welding together of the individual tribes delivered from Egypt, was called to fill the role of a communal ministry to the world. She was to witness by her life to God's greatness and all-encompassing love, and to call all nations to obedience. Instead, she pulled away from the world and turned in on herself. She came to believe she had been called for privilege rather than service, and that her own greatness among the nations was God's purpose for her. Israel's twisted understanding of Moses' goals for the community resulted in the birth of a nation that always walked by on the other side of the road, ignoring the wounds of her neighbor lying near to death on the roadside.

Moses returned to the mountain to intercede for the wayward people who had bowed down before the golden calf. God promised him that he would remain in the midst of the people on their journey, a promise that so lighted Moses' heart with the glow of God's loving forgiveness that he pleaded to be shown God's glory. God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock and passed by him, covering Moses' face so that he was allowed to see only God's glory in passing. The broken tablets were then replaced, and their duplication, this time in the hand of Moses, concluded

the reinstitution of the covenant between God and the people.

The personality of Moses, to this point in the exodus, has been hidden in the shadow of God's greatness. Until the people reached the mountain of God, Moses had been a mere liaison between Israel and God, carrying out God's commands and referring the people directly to God with their multiple complaints. Moses, in this section, comes into his own as a person. Perhaps he was a shy man, who needed the accomplishment of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt under his leadership to prove his worth to himself. We know that he was slow of speech and hesitant to be a spokesman for God. This may be the reason he has not been shown before this time to be a man strong and confident in his capacity as leader.

God's glory, shown to Moses, faithful servant of God, became so much a part of Moses that it became necessary to veil himself before the people (Ex. 34:29-35). His trust and dependence upon God literally impressed itself upon his physical appearance. He towered over the centuries following his death. His personal glory in the minds and devotion of Israel was not equaled by any other leader to walk with them. Only Elijah, several hundred years later, came close to capturing their collective imagination so completely.

At last, the covenant between Israel and God had been established. The covenant attested to God's power of deliverance, and his trustworthiness in promise. God and Israel, his called-out people, pledged themselves to a common life — God's revelation and man's response.

## IX

### *Sour Notes from the Second Fiddles*

(Num. 11:10 to 12:16)

When Israel stopped to encamp at any particular location, the twelve tribes of the Hebrews were to situate themselves around the tent of meeting in a particular fashion, three tribes in a straight line on each of the four compass points around the tent, forming a square. The Levites, the thirteenth tribe, whose role was that of the priesthood, were to camp in the center, immediately surrounding the tent itself. The arrangement of the tribes around the tent was a physical manifestation of a spiritual understanding—the presence of God in the midst of his people. Like an old New England village, with its church spire thrust up from its central position on the village green, the tribes of Israel clustered around the tent.

The encampment remained in one place as long as the cloud, designating God's presence, hovered over the tent.

Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out; but when it was taken up they set out. At the command of the Lord they encamped, and at the command of the Lord they set out; they kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by Moses. (Num. 9:22-23.)

The long stay in the wilderness again brought the complaint from the people about their food, and we read now that even the faithful grew weary. God was angry and Moses disgusted. Moses

expressed his displeasure to God in an entreaty which shows very clearly his feeling of being accepted by God. His words reflected his security in their relationship:

"Why hast thou dealt ill with thy servant? And why have I not found favor in thy sight, that thou dost lay the burden of all this people upon me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that thou shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child, to the land which thou didst swear to give their fathers?' Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is too heavy for me. If thou wilt deal thus with me, kill me at once, if I find favor in thy sight, that I may not see my wretchedness." (Num. 11:11-15.)

Moses was literally weary unto death, and did not hesitate to tell God so. At this moment, rather than face another single day under the burden of their complaints, he prayed for God simply to kill him and put him out of his misery. What a relief it would be sometimes to lie down, and just never get up again! God answered Moses' prayer, not by putting him out of his misery in the manner that Moses had in mind, but by quieting the people, at least momentarily, with the flight of the quail into their midst, providing meat for them.

There is a delightful illustration of the way in which God sometimes answers our prayers in what we would, if we were honest, most likely construe as sheer perversity, in Hannah Whitall Smith's book *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*. The prayer is one offered up by a woman who is desolate because she feels herself to be the most impatient of all creatures. She prays to God to send her patience—and instead, he sends her an inexperienced cook. We very often pray to God to send us a neatly bound package of patience, or thoughtfulness, or loving-kindness, and are quite disappointed when the package doesn't arrive air mail, special delivery, and registered in the next post, and God sends us instead situations to exercise our

patience, thoughtfulness, and loving-kindness.

The concluding verses of ch. 11 are a fascinating contrast to the opening verses of ch. 12. Joshua, a faithful, if sometimes youthfully overzealous, servant to Moses, obviously regarded Moses as his hero. Having seen two men in the camp, out from under what he considered the official sanction of Moses, prophesying in their own right, he felt it his duty to rush to Moses with the information. Indignantly he asked Moses to forbid such behavior, and Moses' reply to Joshua amplifies his feeling of security in his relationship to God: "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (Ex. 11:29).

Moses did not hesitate to complain occasionally to God about the hardships of the life he had been given by God, but he was not concerned to set himself up in God's place as an object of worship. He never found it necessary to bolster his ego by claims of personal grandeur, and he did not claim for himself the unique position as God's only advocate with the people. He was under no compulsion to establish his self-importance by "tooting his own horn," nor did he want anyone else to do so.

Perhaps nowhere is Moses' right relationship to God better illustrated. He trusted God's good intentions for his children, and because he trusted God, he was freed from the enslaving necessity of demanding obeisance from his fellow man. God's love was enough. He did not find it essential to life that he be the *only* leader entrusted with God's spirit and message. Quite the contrary, he heartily wished that all the people might fall under the spirit of prophecy—the more the merrier! It is only when God is trusted to effect his promise of saving grace from the outcome of daily events transpiring in one's life that one is truly free from self-concern to love his neighbors as he loves himself.

Any incidents that place Moses in the role of unique prophet and leader of the people were of God's design and not his own. The single exception recorded is that already mentioned, when Moses, in anger at the distrust of the people, struck the rock twice

to supply them with water. Joshua's fears for Moses' honor and reputation having been duly quieted by Moses, the chapter comes to a close.

There follows in ch. 12 a story about Aaron and Miriam, whose envy of Moses' greatness as a leader was manifested in their jealousy and resentment at having to play what they obviously considered "second fiddle" before the people. Their attitude is an interesting contrast to Joshua's concern that someone would usurp the greatness of his hero. Miriam and Aaron were bitterly discontent with the *status quo*, but instead of attacking Moses directly, they first launched an attack against his wife.

The Scripture states that they spoke against Moses because he had married a Cushite woman, as if this in some way made him less qualified to be a leader of the people. The statement causes some problems, because the term "Cushite" is generally conceived to mean "Ethiopian." This, plus the fact that the accusation is phrased in such a way as to indicate that Moses had recently taken the woman as a wife, when there is no other Scriptural evidence that Moses had any wife other than Zipporah, to whom he had been married for many years, has caused consternation among some Biblical scholars.

Chances are, however, that the term was meant to apply to Midian, as one would also assume it does in Hab. 3:7, where the terms "Cushan" and "Midian" are used in conjunction. "Cush" probably meant simply some part of Arabia, and the choice of the term here by Aaron and Miriam was undoubtedly made to signify Zipporah's foreign, and therefore inferior, extraction. She was different—she was a Gentile. Whatever the explanation of the use of the term, it is painfully clear that Moses has been attacked on grounds totally unrelated to the problem at hand. Only after this accusation was voiced did Miriam and Aaron summon sufficient courage to state the heart of the real problem—their own jealousy. "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (Num. 12:2.)

Is there anything as perverse or insidious as a man's jealousy of

another who he believes has gotten a fairer "shake" than himself? Seldom do we have the courage to state forthrightly our criticism of our rivals in such a manner as to show decisively our own jealous nature. No, in our seething resentment, we attack our enemy in ways that will malign his character, and spread a thick smoke screen of defamation around him. We poison the well, so that all may see that the water drawn from it is not fit for use in any capacity, except maybe to scrub down the back porch steps. We let it be known that our envied rival lacks culture, education, and background, and furthermore, he is married to a woman who just simply won't "fit in."

We are so very accomplished at this, we can write off an entire race of people in our country, excluding them from participation in human existence on the basis of their color. In parts of the South the people have closed their schools, and finding that insufficient protection, have also closed their park system, to avoid integration at every level. They would rather die than live in a world with Negroes in it. The Negro is never examined on the basis of individual merit, but like Moses' wife is lumped into a racial category that prohibits him a place in the human race.

Those who would rather die than live in a world with Negroes in it have failed to recognize this as the world that God has given them—a world with Negroes in it! Now isn't that just like God! White supremacy, the idol of pride-ridden pigmentation, asserts itself defiantly in a world that houses black men, yellow men, red men, brown men, *and* white men under the same blue sky, on the same green earth, and sustains them with the same necessities of food and water. God has blessed all colors by dignifying them with life itself.

We, with white skin, an accident of our birth which we could neither have demanded nor refused, point a superior finger at the Negro in Deerfield, Little Rock, Montgomery, or Johannesburg, and our aim hits squarely in the face of God, who has walked the dusty roads of our world, speaking the words of life from the lips of our neighbors, and we have rightly translated "love thy neighbor" into the funeral oration of our own am-

bitious pride. We read the words "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13), and in a moment of noble sentimentality we feel that we might perhaps be able to surrender our physical life in a supreme act of heroism for our friends—and refuse to hear that God demands always the death of the life that lives contrary to his will. We interpret the command to die with Christ on the cross to mean the death of our physical lives, and since this is seldom demanded of us by our society, we completely miss the implication of the cross God offers us—the cross that calls upon us to put to death our political life, or our denominational life, or our life as a pride-ridden member of the white race.

Our bigotry spreads like a cancer throughout all of our lives, and the ugliness and lovelessness that reside within us are an expression of emotional poverty which will not yield to reason. Our condition is identical to that of the chronic alcoholic's, and any reason we might have is quickly turned into a rationalization in order that our attitudes may gratify powerful emotional needs which keep us enslaved to death in the midst of life. Our consuming envy and resentment we wield like a two-edged sword, pulling "superiors" down to show that we are their equal or more, and pushing "inferiors" farther down to show how superior we really are. But in either case, it is our *own* insecurity and inferiority that is the problem. Our need to label someone inferior to ourselves, *whatever* evidence we cite in substantiation, is a simple exposé of the basic need to inflate our own crippled ego.

We are unwilling to believe that which we have been told, that God loves us as we are, and we need not prove ourselves superior to others in order to claim his love. All the "proof" of our merit in the world cannot make a claim on God's regard, nor will our emotions or rationalizations in any way absolve us from his command to love—a command that can be obeyed only by being willing to trust God's love for us, thus freeing us from ourselves that we may will to love our neighbor.

Miriam and Aaron, convinced of their own inferiority, demon-

strated their emotional poverty by attempting, through emotional prejudice, to malign Moses' usefulness to the community. They felt they had been given a raw deal by "life" — they weren't the all-powerful leadership team they surely deserved to be. Life had dealt them a bad hand, and their paranoia led them to a bitter resentment of Moses' position in the community. They were saying: "It isn't fair. Why should we play second fiddle to Moses — hasn't God also spoken to us? Why should Moses be so much more important than we are?" They refused to know themselves in truth, and their outward resentment was a sign of an inner emptiness. God's love, freely given to them as members of the body of Israel, was lost in the labyrinthine darkness of their own lives, kept at bay by human pride. They could not accept it, or the life he had given them, because they believed what they had was not life. They thought they would have to share Moses' glory in order to have life for themselves.

They avoided admitting the kind of people they were, and blocked off God's love from their lives with the high, impenetrable wall of self-concern they had so carefully erected. When we avoid facing the truth about the kind of people we are, we also block off God's love from our lives. When pride resists truth, God's love becomes judgment, and guilt prevails in our lives, crippling our relationship to ourselves and our fellow man. As a test, let's cast ourselves for a moment in the role of one who has come to such a condition because she believes she has been shortchanged by life.

Let us say that, because of economic circumstances, I am a woman who finds it necessary to work to help support my two children, and as a result they are left pretty much to their own devices for many hours a day. Now, I may accept this situation for what it really is, and resist the temptation to resentment, or I may harbor tremendous resentment toward my husband, who I believe has cheated me by being an inadequate provider. As a result of my circumstances, I suffer from guilt because of the unavoidable neglect of my children. I dare not openly express my resentment. In the first place, I am not honest enough, and

in the second place, I fear the consequences that might result. Because I am not honest and open toward those around me, I am unwilling to be responsible for my real attitude. I dare not say openly, 'Why should I have to work, when that lazy woman next door has such a feather bed to lie on?'

While I do not express my resentment openly, I have a million clever ways to remind my husband of his failure, burdening him in turn with guilt and a desperate sense of defeat. I serve inadequate food, poorly prepared, taking pains to remind one and all that I had no time to do better. Anyway, I am exhausted because I have had to work so hard all day away from home. I needn't really even verbalize any of this—I can make certain that everyone understands the situation without words at all. Personal resentment is a versatile instrument, and I discover many complex tunes to play on it. I find a multitude of ways to remind my family (and the world in general) of the injustice that has been perpetrated on me—chronic fatigue, incipient poor health, a sad, long-suffering countenance, tension headaches, asthma, arthritis, angina—all of these are at my disposal.

My resentment toward my husband spills over into my entire life, blocking God's love at every turn. I resist any offer of love from my would-be sympathetic and helpful neighbors. I cannot, however, separate any offer of love from the offer of God's love, whatever its immediate source, for love, no matter what its genesis, is a gift of God. We think it a small thing, a thing of no great value, when we resist and turn aside love offered by our fellow man, yet it is God's love we have turned away. There is no love in the world that was not put there by God.

Instead of being glad to have concern and care extended to my children by neighboring mothers, who live their lives uncursed by the necessity of working outside the home, I forbid my children any relationship with the neighbors, and they are strictly forbidden to leave their home to play with any children when they return from school in the afternoons. They are not allowed to accept favors, including occasional lunches or refreshments

with the neighborhood children, because any kindness proffered my "neglected" children is a direct affront to me. So I place, not only myself, but my children in the position of refusing God's love.

There can be no way of escape for them from the curse of my own selfish pride — and in time they become hostile to my husband and me, their parents (whom they blame for their situation in life), and destructive toward society (from whose love they have been shut off). It is then that I come really to experience the full impact of the Second Commandment, which ends with the warning, "for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:5-6).

God's love cannot penetrate where it is not wanted or received as the gift of life. How can it be that we will deliberately shut out the offer of love? Most of us believe that we desire the love and affection of our fellow man, yet we are every day guilty of treading underfoot God's gift as it comes through our neighbor, because the offer of that love reveals to us the truth about our lives, a truth we will not accept. The face of love then takes on the harsh mask of judgment, for judgment is nothing save love shut out and refused by us.

I will not say to my sympathetic neighbors: "Thank you — what would I do without you? I'm so grateful to you for your kindness to my children," but say instead to Mary Jane, my daughter: "You are not to leave this house when you get home from school, and you are not *ever* to go to Mrs. Smith's. Since I can't be here to watch you and be responsible for you, and can't return any favors extended, you will simply have to stay at home where you won't get in trouble, or impose on the neighbors, placing me in their obligation. It's not my fault that I have to work, but I do, or we wouldn't have enough money to keep body and soul together." And I add to my spoken words with

my life, which says, as I twist my resentment until it strangles the life of my family, "And you and everybody within reach are going to pay and pay dearly for what has happened to me."

Or perhaps I am a man in a low-salaried, going-no-where, clerical position, assigned to a secondary role in life because I was cheated of that which I consider to be my birthright—a college education—by an improvident and profligate father. I make everyone pay for what happened to me. The chip on my shoulder is easily dislodged by any tiny thing said that I might be able to construe as pointing to my inferiority. My family must walk on silent, cautious feet around me, for fear of being the innocent victims of the venom of resentment which has permeated my entire existence. I have let resentment of what I consider my injustice sap the strength of life's beauty. My imagined inferiority becomes real with each gesture or remark that I can interpret as reinforcing it.

Miriam and Aaron, burning with the self-pity of such as these, stated their bitter resentment against a man who had just demonstrated his own lack of envy and jealousy. The Scripture states simply, following their outburst, a fact that was authenticated by his life: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). "Meek" does not mean here what we take it to mean by our contemporary usage of it. It does not mean that Moses was a "Casper Milquetoast," but rather that he did not feel it necessary to fight for his status before his fellow man, but was concerned first and foremost with serving God in the best possible way. He possessed the quality of true humility.

The Sermon on the Mount includes in the Beatitudes the words, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). This is a quality generally considered unworth cultivating in our push to qualify as successful people in a world that recognizes success only as it is manifested in the hard-driving, acquisitive nature of the aggressive materialist. There is no room for meekness in a world that accepts as gospel, "You'd

better look out for number one, because no one else will! " We worship the idol of success, and are required by it to demonstrate our loyalty by being pushy, aggressive, and determined to achieve success at any price.

If we would put content into the distasteful sentiment of Jesus, we need only look at his life to do so, and recognize the meekness of his own character when he put on the apron of the servant at the Last Supper and washed the feet of the disciples. This response, which is clearly enjoined on all of us, is the supreme command to self-forgetfulness. We cannot be made perfect, that is, we cannot receive God's grace unto life, if we insist we are doing all right on our own, and fight for our status among men, setting ourselves up as better than, or at least equal to, our fellow man.

Meekness, or humility, as it is clothed in the flesh and blood of Moses, is the perfect complement to the natures of Miriam and Aaron. It is the grace to admit our own weaknesses, our sin — to face up to reality before God. The prospect is certainly a terrifying one, and enough to send most of us running, like Adam and Eve, in search of the nearest fig tree and hiding place which can conceal us as we really are from God. Only as we are willing to look at ourselves in the blinding light of God's reality will we be able to stand in God's presence.

Moses was under no delusions as to his own grandeur — he recognized himself as a creature, under the imperative of his Creator to serve his fellow man in the capacity of leadership. His source of humility was the realization of God's presence in his life as he met Him in the confrontation with his fellow man, his neighbor. He was constrained to love his neighbor, and his service to God consisted of that. On the other hand, he had no necessity for promoting his self-esteem in his own eyes or the eyes of the world, because he experienced himself as one who had received the fulfillment of God's promise of life, a fulfillment that became reality in his own trust of God's faithfulness.

The source of humility for us also is the realization of the presence of Christ in our lives already. We, like Moses, meet him

in our neighbor, and it is our neighbor who is given to us by God to reveal to us who we really are. In him we discover our strengths and our weaknesses. Humility about self is truth about self as it is revealed to us in our relationships to our neighbor. In the neighbor I despise, because of her "high and mighty" attitude, the Christ waits to reveal to me my jealous and covetous nature.

The Christ stands at the door and knocks also in the neighbor who infuriates me because she lets her children run wild and neglects her house, revealing to me my own resentment that I must maintain certain standards (which somehow I conveniently forget I myself have established, and associate their establishment in some vague, mystic way with a law that sets forth the "way things should be run"). Because my own standards are not regarded by her as being universally valid and binding, her relaxed attitude is a threat to all that I hold dear and that infuses my life with meaning. Any lack of appreciation on the part of my own family for my well-ordered household convinces me that there simply isn't any justice.

The Christ is ready to reveal my lovelessness and selfish regard for my own interests in the happy-go-lucky fellow in the office, who received a promotion instead of me, despite the fact that my work is obviously superior to his. He is always so busy being everybody's pal, he doesn't get half the work accomplished that I do. When life does not go the way we desire it to go, we almost invariably accuse our neighbor as the cause of our trouble, and in this we also accuse God, who has given us our neighbor. Only in extremity do we accuse ourselves. The moment that occasions the breach between my neighbor and me should be a moment of revelation, for in this moment of broken fellowship and denial of life I should most be able to see that neither my neighbor nor I can grasp life and establish it on the basis of our own words or deeds, but life is found only in the Word of God which says, "Deny yourself and follow the truth." I am unable even to recognize the truth revealed to me in the junior clerk in the office, whom I like tremendously because he asks my advice on every-

thing and follows my suggestions so flatteringly, when here I am given a perfect opportunity to see myself as the vain and conceited creature I really am.

Yet, only as I allow the Christ, when I am confronted by his presence in my neighbor, to reveal to me my true self, will I be moved to repentance and receive true life in the freedom I thereby experience. Even I should be able to see that it certainly isn't living when my days are marred by petty resentment and jealousy which result in a turmoil of the spirit, leaving me bereft of the peace which I so earnestly desire. Each slight that I believe has been directed at me gets posted in life's ledger on the debit side, and the burden of past wrongs so saturates my spirit that there is no room for the newness of life as it is offered today. Today, and therefore tomorrow, must wait until I have justified the past, and I come to suffer permanently from what Peter Howard has called "ingrown eyeballs."

Miriam and Aaron refused the truth about themselves as it was certainly revealed to them in the terrible meekness of this man Moses. They were concerned chiefly to be recognized as equally important with him, and as fully qualified as he to pass God's word on to the people. They asked equal billing on the marquee of the tent of meeting. God was fully aware of the situation, and in his anger summoned them all to the woodshed for the discipline that was to be theirs: "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting" (Num. 12:4). His anger against Miriam and Aaron descended in a cloud on the tent, and when the cloud lifted, Miriam was leprous. Only then, when it was too late, did the full truth strike Aaron, who turned to Moses, pleading: "Oh, my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. Let her not be as one dead" (Num. 12:11-12). Only when he was faced with accepting responsibility for his behavior did Aaron repent.

Moses did not sneer, "It serves you right!" as surely you or I would have, but cried out to God to heal Miriam, unwilling to see Aaron and Miriam so severely punished for the attack on his character and position. But the past cannot be rolled back

—our second chance comes in our opportunity to respond as the future comes to us day by day, not in being able to live again some regretted moment of our past. Miriam was to be shut outside the camp—automatic treatment for leprosy—and even though it was to be for the short period of a week, during this week she would discover the consequence of living a life without love. She was to be cut off from the community.

Unbroken fellowship with our fellow man is the gift of rare value resulting from our mutual trust in God. The basis of community with our fellow man is truth, and the self-made darkness we construct to cover the truth stamps “lie” on our lives, and we are immersed in our own darkness. But if we walk in the light of the truth of Christ, as we have been shown we must do, “we have fellowship with one another” (I John 1:7).

Obedience to God’s commandments is never something we can accomplish in the abstract—it is only in the life we live with our fellow man that we can obey his commandments. We cannot be “saved” individuals and at the same time “unsaved” members of the community. We cannot separate our individual from our corporate life. Although God speaks his word to the individual, he does so to the individual in the community. The commandments are senseless when the individual to whom they come is separated from the community. The “greatest” commandment loses all meaning when it is regarded merely in the abstract. It becomes like a favorite word chanted over and over by a small child until it has lost all its meaning and has become a mere nonsense syllable. The only way man can love God is to love his neighbor as himself. If he professes to love God outside community, he is worshiping the idol of self-glorification. God’s word of deliverance, i.e., exodus, came to individuals called *in a community*. It was not an individual that was delivered across the Red Sea, but the community of Israel.

Israel remained in the same location until Miriam was returned to her place in the community, and a crisis in that community was passed. Moses had demonstrated by his behavior radical obedience to God’s commandment of love, which manifests itself

in perfect meekness. Moses did not need to seek a corroborating witness to his righteous attitude, but was so lost in God that he literally forgot his own existence. He was still the same old Moses, one who had demurred at accepting God's call in the first place, and who had complained balefully to God such a short time before about the heavy burden of responsibility for the grumbling community of Israel which rested on his shoulders; but secure in the knowledge of God's love and acceptance of that old Moses, he was not important to himself, and could stand before God and pray in agonized concern for Miriam.

It was not that, in his humility, he had a low opinion of his own worth, or that he regarded himself as of no value—but that his humility freed him from being concerned about himself and the way life was treating him, and the status he enjoyed with his fellow man. Only by accepting God's concern for his life as genuine could he be truly meek and lose himself in the service of God and his fellow man. Moses was able to put on the apron of service and lower himself, as Christ, to the floor before his fellow men, removing their sandals and washing their feet with hands that sought to show only love and concern.

## X

### *The Withered Branch*

(Num., chs. 13; 14)

The Lord said to Moses, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I give to the people of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers shall you send a man, every one a leader among them." (Num. 13:1-2.)

The spies were to discover whether the people who dwelt in the land were weak or strong, few or many, and whether the land was good or bad. They were to learn if the people lived in camps, as did the Hebrews, or whether they dwelt in fortified cities. Moses' final message to the men chosen for the task cheered them to do the best they could and to bring back some of the fruit of the land.

Israel stood at the gateway to the Promised Land. With an intelligence report from those who were sent in to look over the situation, they would be better able to decide in what manner to proceed. Upon returning to the people with their report, the spies seemed singularly unable to reach a unified conclusion. They asserted both that the land was fertile and wealthy and that it was barren. In addition, there was a divergent report on the probability of Israel's entering the land and overcoming its inhabitants.

The majority report disclaimed such a possibility, stating that the inhabitants dwelt in strong, heavily fortified cities. The minority report, given by Caleb and verified by Joshua, was that Israel could easily overcome the land, and Caleb urged Israel to

act immediately. Their confidence went completely unshared by the other ten, who declared, "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we" (Num. 13:31).

The ten desired their opinion to prevail, and in order to tip the scales in their favor, they weighted their report with the information that the land was one that devoured its inhabitants, and not only that, there were giants in the land. The fear of a possible engagement in combat with the people they had seen, reduced them, in their own minds, to the size and strength of grasshoppers. They were so convinced of their relative weakness, they believed that the people of the land likewise regarded them as grasshoppers.

Psychologists have a word for this — they call it "projection." This is the attributing to another person, or situation, one's own inner feelings about oneself, and the "objective" experiencing of those inner feelings as having reality outside oneself. Obviously these men had no heart for fighting a battle to conquer the Promised Land. How disappointed they must have felt when they discovered that the gift of the land was not to be one presented to them by God on the proverbial silver platter! When Moses had, on that last night in Egypt, spoken concerning the Feast of the Passover, he had told the people, "And when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service" (Ex. 12:25). The people must have harbored some vague hope that they were going to Paradise restored — the Garden gates were to be opened again, and a land of abundance and freedom was simply awaiting their arrival at the end of the rainbow.

What a frustrating disillusionment to discover that the Promised Land was fully occupied by a people who certainly had no intention of giving it up without a struggle. Baptism through the waters of the Red Sea had not been an act of magic whereby Israel was to be placed automatically under the bough of the heavily laden tree of life, where she could lounge comfortably in the shade of its sheltering leaves, and merely stretch out her hands to grasp its all-sufficient fruit. Being a participant in

the exodus was no panacea for being a creature, any more than becoming a baptized member of the Christian church is a guarantee against the trouble of living my life. I must continue to work to support myself, put up with my relatives, to say nothing of my friends and enemies, the grass must be cut in summer and the snow shoveled in winter. I must be willing to trust God wherever he leads me, in whatever battles I find myself engaged, before this alien land becomes the Promised Land, the Kingdom of God.

"But this is not the Promised Land I was expecting," Israel laments in essence. "True, I cannot deny that this is a land flowing with the promise of milk and honey, good to the eyes and full of the promise of fulfillment, but it is also filled with fierce inhabitants who would keep it for their own. How can I overcome these before I can enjoy the promises?" So the Israelites fell back before the task of taking the Promised Land which stretched out before their eyes in its fertility and goodness. The entire congregation rose up with a cry, and the people moaned and wept the entire night when faced with the report of the men who had returned from spying out the land. "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!" (Num. 14:2.)

They were like the American GI who all during the Second World War said that every situation in which he found himself made him wish he could go back — just one step. When he was drafted, he wished he could go back to being a civilian. When he was shipped overseas, he wished he could just go back to boot camp. When he hit the beaches, he wished he were back on the ship, seasickness and all. When he was crouching at the bottom of a foxhole, he wished he were back on the beach. When he was captured and made a prisoner, he would have given almost anything to be back in a foxhole again.

All this time the Israelites had longed for Egypt; now they decided they would be happy if only allowed to keep the wilderness and die there. Emerson's philosophical warning to exercise care in one's desires because of the likelihood of their fulfillment

came millenniums too late for them, but they were soon to be early victims of its practical truth. It was not conquerors they desired to be, but spoiled children of a doting father who would provide for their lives without the least effort on their part. Comfort, peace, and security were the watchwords of the day. As long as Israel believed that the Promised Land was a gift she would receive because of some great merit that resided within her, and for which she would not have to struggle, she had managed to crawl along after Moses and Aaron, grumblingly and sullenly most of the time, but following, nevertheless. Now that the full impact of the role God had for her had begun to make its deep impression, now that she realized the decision that she herself must make to be what God called her to be, she could think of nothing save turning on her heels and running away.

"And they said to one another, 'Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt.'" (Num. 14:4.) How early Israel betrayed the signs in her of the withered branches of the fig tree in the New Testament! Throughout the Bible the fig tree is the symbol of Israel, the church. There is a puzzling story, found in nearly all the Gospels, concerning Jesus' cursing a fig tree, which seems unreasonable and perplexing until we understand it. Jesus went to gather some fruit from a fig tree along the road, and when there was no fruit on the branches, he cursed the tree, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" (Matt. 21:19.) The disciples, upon seeing the fulfillment of the curse (one Gospel says immediately, another says the following day), were astounded, and asked Jesus how such a thing could be. Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will be done." (Matt. 21:21.)

The words of Caleb and Joshua, urging the congregation of Israel to take over the land before them, told the people the same thing. They said that the goodness of the land had been proved and that the people were under the protection of the Lord. If Israel had faith in God, she need have no fear of the

Canaanites, who would be overcome with God's help. The Canaanites would become as a people who are without shade in the desert, and with faith in God, Israel could accomplish the task of conquering the land. The voice of God spoke through Caleb and Joshua, telling Israel to trust, but Caleb and Joshua were disturbers of the peace, and Israel desired a fate for them like the fate of Stephen in the New Testament. Stephen was a man full of faith (Acts 6:5), but his words came to those who would not tolerate the threat that his words held for their lives. They would not endure the pronouncement of judgment that he made on the shallow superficiality of their religion. They had clearly heard him say that "Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place [the synagogue], and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us" (Acts 6:14). Luke states that "they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke" (Acts 6:10), and they stoned him to death. So the ancient Israelites planned to stone Caleb and Joshua. The *living* word would not be allowed to disturb the peace of the congregation.

When the light, the living Word, comes to man, he must choose whether he will remain in darkness, in death, in his own past. The coming of the Word gives to him an opportunity to become someone new, someone born again. The Israelites were encountered by God's demand, which was clear to them, but their desire for security led them to seek a refuge from that word. They sought to kill the bearer of the word, thinking in that manner to erase it from their presence. Israel, in the New Testament, protected herself from the living Word in Jesus Christ by her possession of the Scriptures. These she imbued with a magic to ensure eternal life. She gave them precedence over the living Word, believing she could wrest eternal life from the Scriptures as they pertained to her behavior. The men who sought to kill Jesus Christ, to erase the encounter with the living Word from the world, were slaves of a dogma that they believed would save them. They had not understood their own history.

Had Israel faith that the way of God is the way of victory, then the conquest of Canaan, or the moving of a mountain, would

not have been too great for her. The story of the fig tree in the book of Mark says that the tree was nothing but leaves, and the disciples discovered the following day that it had withered away to its roots. The broad leaves of self-concern, stretched to shade the people and protect them from the life to which they were called, were withered by God. The barren fig tree, which had all gone to leaf, was in the New Testament the Jewish nation—God's people who had been called to be his church.

In Luke, Jesus tells a parable about the fig tree. There was a fig tree in a large vineyard that remained barren year after year, until the owner ordered it cut down. The vinedresser asked that it might be given another year to bear fruit, and if after that time, in which he would give it special care and attention, it did not produce fruit, then it should be cut down. (Luke 13:6-9.) Israel was given, in this parable set down by Luke, a year of grace to produce the fruit of the spirit or be cut down. The community of Israelites in the Old Testament, standing on the edge of the Promised Land, had what in human history seems an almost infinite period of time to produce the fruit demanded by God. When they came to a face-to-face realization of that which was demanded of them, they yearned only to return to the bondage of Egypt—to their past, where they were not required to live in responsibility, but could exist in captivity to a world that would make their decisions for them.

How long, do you suppose, the Christian community—the New Israel—has been given by God to produce the good fruit of the vine? Have we a year, a decade, a century? Or has our time run out? Time seems to be running out all over the world. Our missionary enterprise in Africa and Asia has never decisively been able to separate itself from the exportation of Western culture, which we have in some queer manner confused with the gospel, and we appear to have made more of a contribution to the forces of chaos than to a world of peace under Christ. There are responsible and concerned statesmen who give Africa only a few remaining months to solve her basic problems. Time is clearly running out in Africa. Is it also running out for the

church everywhere as we see it now? Israel is still standing, looking out over the Promised Land, a land which she must take and conquer, and she runs away in fright to choose a captain who will lead her safely back to Egypt. The church is captive to culture — the clergy, those of them who have succumbed to the institutional environment of big business, are hired hands of economy, the members are lost sheep without a shepherd.

But then, the members do not want a shepherd to lead them to the conquest of the Promised Land, but merely a captain to keep them safe from the role of being God's chosen people and going the way of the cross. Is there nothing that can be done to awaken Israel? Must it stand forever coveting the Promised Land, the Kingdom of God, without being willing to accept the responsibility of receiving it as a gift given to it by God — a gift that entails much suffering in the acceptance, even to the cross?

Before anything anywhere can be done, the church must stop and look at herself. We must recognize what we have become, we must free ourselves from the fear of failure to capture the Kingdom of God, and admit that failure is already ours. Somewhere, lying buried deep in the rubble of the modern phenomena of the institution that continues to call itself the church, is truly the church, forgotten and passed over. Somewhere, beneath the smoldering ruins of the schismatic chaos, is the memory of the event that called the church into being. Somewhere, along the course of history, the institution has slain the church, and being unwilling to admit to murder, has not even given it a decent burial. At least during the time of the Reformation, there was the recognition of the death of that which had formerly called itself the church, and the reforming of *the* church into life.

The million-dollar edifices that house the institutional church, like the pyramids of old, are monuments to the greatness of man and the tombs of New Testament Christianity. We leave the quiet, persuasive hour of Sunday-morning service, which has been punctuated by a little Scripture, a sermon, and the elaborate vocal gymnastics of a choir, complete with podium and conductor, having been urged to engage in fierce competition with

the Baptists, or Methodists, or Episcopalians, or Presbyterians down the street for the favor and dollars of all those who live in the bounds of our parish. When we have succeeded in swelling the membership rolls with their number, we deluge them with the pink-and-white pills of platitude that are supposed to endow one with the magic ingredients for peace, power, poise, and personality. We shuttle them into compartments hither and yon in the organization, and bury them in an avalanche of mediocrity which teaches them how to retreat from life and parrot convincingly our dogmatic panaceas. We drown them in a Niagara of entreaties for their money to provide sustenance for the expansion and upkeep of our architectural anachronisms, which we have thoroughly confused with the Kingdom of God. We dazzle them with skillfully planned brochures produced by public-relations experts, and if we accomplish the inevitable end of our efforts, we successfully inoculate them against the real meaning of Christianity.

Contemporary Christianity has become almost as clever in a body as the individuals who comprise it at escaping from the confrontation with the truth—the Christ—because it prattles incessantly about Christ, wrapping itself in such an insulation of dead dogma and annual institutional statistical summaries of success that it nowhere leaves an opening for the question of the living needs of fellow man to reach its ears. The problems of crime are cheerfully left to the *hired* police force; the problem of juvenile delinquency is gladly left in the hands of social workers *hired* by the community; the needs of the sick, the lame, and the sinners have ceased to be the concern of an institution that had its origin in one about whom the Pharisees, the respectable, prosperous church members of New Testament times, asked, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Matt. 9:11). When have we risen from our foam-rubber, velvet-covered pew cushions of comfort to go forth to the crossroads of the world to break the bread of Christian love and fellowship with the prostitutes, homosexuals, delinquents, and dope pushers of our communities?

To appease our conscience, we occasionally set aside special days of prayer and take up another collection. Our revenue has come to consist almost entirely of "collections" because we have ceased to understand what it means to "offer" ourselves and our material goods to our fellow man, and thereby to God. "Truly," Jesus said, "I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Matt. 25:40.) These words have no relationship to the construction of the Gothic and colonial towers of Babel in a world where half of God's children go to bed hungry every night. Yet the institutional monster is a vulture which goes forth to seek victims that it can bleed for the glorification of itself.

We mouth the words "grace" and "loving-kindness," "re-birth" and "new life," and turn a consolidated back on a soulless economy, prejudiced racial segregation, hunger, and the turmoil of bewilderment that is engulfing an entire world, but we feel so safe in our fireproof tombs we have no intention of giving them up for a try at this "new birth" business. It is so much more comfortable to be dead. Of course, we are so busy, we can nearly escape noticing that we are dead. We have our committees and subcommittees, our officer and board meetings, our planning sessions for the glorious ongoing of the program, our study groups, and special study groups, and intensive study groups, which keep us so occupied supporting the *status quo* of empty organizationalism we successfully avoid being confronted by the cross, which we have translated into an *objet d'art* we proudly dangle at the front of our sanctuaries and show off to visitors. "Why, our cross was specifically designed for our sanctuary by the city's foremost interior decorator. Isn't the mosaic pattern beautiful? Why, do you know how much it cost?"

Well, it cost 7,300,000 quarts of milk for the relief of the starving children of Africa and Asia. It cost fourteen hundred pairs of good leather shoes for the cold, barefooted children of the Italian, Mexican, and Negro ghetto across the river. It cost months of life in this country for several homeless refugees—enough time to enable them to learn English and find useful jobs.

It cost enough money to provide milk, bread, and a bowl of rice for twenty-two thousand hungry children every day for an entire year. It cost an infinite number of God's tears shed across the centuries because selfish, stiff-necked, prideful man refuses to learn what "love thy neighbor" really means. It is a cross drained of meaning in our "Christian" land which scrapped, as surplus and unwanted, military equipment amounting to seven and a half billion dollars in 1958 alone. Figuring out how many quarts of milk that represents is a job too astronomical to undertake!

We have forgotten the blazing revolutionist who strode into the Temple and overthrew our tables of commerce, scattering our false offerings. We stop our ears to the accounts of his riding roughshod over our precious, sacred institutionalism, our legalistic charlatanism, and our excessively dear traditionalism. We are comfortable in the knowledge that he did not mean *us* when he called the backbone of our churches a "generation of vipers," and we clap our hands to our ears when we hear someone remind us that he called our most devoted churchmen "whited sepulchres" — whitewashed tombs filled with corruption and decay. He exposed our dead religion, and reminded us, as Amos had tried to before him, that we sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes — and trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted. He demolished our value structure, and told us we had traded our birthright for a pot of stew.

When one sees what it is to be a Christian in Denmark [or the U.S.A.], how could it occur to anyone that this is what Jesus Christ talks about: cross and agony and suffering, crucifying the flesh, suffering for the doctrine, being salt, being sacrificed, etc.? No, in Protestantism, especially in Denmark, Christianity marches to a different melody, to the tune of "Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along" — Christianity is enjoyment of life, tranquilized.<sup>8</sup>

These words were written over a hundred years ago by a concerned Christian named Sören Kierkegaard, who reminded his

church, as he should ours also, that Judas had so little understanding of money that he disposed of the greatest source of money the world has encountered for a mere thirty pieces of silver, when the institutional church has procured for Christ's blood millions of dollars by betraying Christianity and transforming it into worldliness. Kierkegaard's words offend us—surely they do not apply to us! Yet it is we who have made the gospel into “come believe in something unbelievable and you will be saved” and turned the church into a carnival, complete with barkers and money-changers. The truth that can be found in the blinding light of the Christ has revealed our empty symbols as umbrellas which shield our lives of hypocrisy from the truth.

We have refused to trust God and his devastating call to conquer the Promised Land, as Israel of old refused to place its life into the dependable hands of God as it was called to cross into Canaan. God's anger flared against Israel: “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them” (Num. 14:11-12). God spoke to the same distrusting people in Mark, saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Israel, standing outside the Promised Land, was called to repent and believe the good news of the exodus, the new life given by God, but because it would not, God told Moses, his faithful servant, “I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they” (Num. 14:12). In later times, Jesus likewise told Israel, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it” (Matt. 21:43). The Jews of the New Testament times would not hear, believing that the Temple which they had built was the symbol of eternal life wrapped in the pages of the Scriptures. Their superstitious belief in the power of the Temple to stand forever is the same as the contemporary belief that the building on the

corner, with the graceful spire which reaches toward heaven, is the church, and that it is *this* against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

When the Hebrews complacently said that God would not allow the Temple at Jerusalem to be desecrated — not that symbol of their religious organization, not that holy building — Babylon became the finger of God's wrath which utterly destroyed it. The Hebrews had a second chance, and learning nothing from their own history, the Temple was again destroyed, this time by Rome, after the Christian community had become a reality. The Reformation as thoroughly destroyed the Christian church in its accepted and familiar form. We are once warned — will we have another chance?

God's decision to cut off Israel from the promise and give the promise to Moses was met by Moses' pleas on behalf of the people. Moses' prayer only partially forestalled the punishment God had sworn would be theirs. The people were to be spared and given another chance to produce the fruit of the vine that was expected of them, but those who had made up the company that had come out of Egypt, and had been witnesses to all of God's glory, were not to be allowed to enter into the Promised Land. They were to have their desire to die in the wilderness. Their dead bodies were to fall there, and be buried there, and they were never to see the fulfillment of the promise. Only Caleb and Joshua, who had had the faith and willingness to move on, and all of those who were under twenty years of age, were to be allowed to enter into the Kingdom. Only those who were young enough in spirit to change, to grow, to move, to be open to a future in a world that would itself change, would be partakers of the promise. After the last body had fallen in the wilderness, Israel — the new Israel — would be allowed to take possession of Canaan.

The men who had brought the evil report to the people were struck by a plague and died, and when the Israelites heard God's decree concerning their own fate, they saw too late the consequence of being unwilling to go forth in trust. Then, in an

effort to redeem themselves for their lack of faith, they decided they would go up into the land anyway and fight for it, but it was truly too late. Moses warned them that they would be going alone — neither he nor the presence of God, as symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant, would accompany them. They went anyway. They decided they would win the Promised Land without God's help in their own way, and they went forth into battle and were bitterly defeated. That which had been denied them in their distrust was not to become theirs by their own organizational efforts. No amount of cleverly organized evangelistic campaigns can win the world to become God's children. The church will never inherit the Kingdom, the gift of God, until it has listened to his living Word, the Word that has commanded the love, not the institutional exploitation, of one's neighbors.

Israel, refusing to trust in the life to which God called her, a life she regarded as unsafe and unrealistically impractical, could not shape that life with her own hands in her own way. Israel can never retreat in fear from the role that is hers, unwilling to be God's children, and live. She was defeated here, as she was to be defeated so many times throughout the Old Testament, when she was unwilling to trust in the power of God, rather than in her own hand, or the chariots of Egypt, or the secular way of the world.

What of Israel today? When will she stop fearing to trust the Lord, and stop trusting in the arm of her own power and wealth, her big buildings, lavish programs, and institutional aggrandizement? When will she be willing to accept the good news and go into the world preaching *it*, offering it at the peril of her own life, as a free gift from a loving God, who has entrusted it with the message of love for all men? When will the gospel be enough? Will the institution continue to deny its call to become the church, and refuse to go into the Promised Land and take it for God? And will her refusal mean that those above the age of twenty will never see the fulfillment of the promise? Will only those who are flexible and open, unbiased by the dead dogmas of law and organization, be allowed to be the servants of God, the one

true God who understands the needs of the world, consisting not in buildings and increased membership rolls and bigger budgets, but in the washing of the feet of one's fellow man? Must God again raise up a new generation within Israel who will heed his call and become the church?

The need for the church cries within men's hearts everywhere — their bewilderment and aloneness fragments the meaning of their lives. But men have forgotten how to *be* the church, and somehow someone must teach them again, so that they can go forth and receive the Kingdom of God which is at hand, awaiting their trust in the goodness of God and his way to life.

## XI

### *The Maverick*

(Num., chs. 22 to 24)

Mutiny and unfaith continued to flourish among the Israelites. After losing the battle to enter the Promised Land near Hebron, the people moved on and were denied passage from the south, and found it necessary to pass around the south and southeastern sectors of Canaan. Their grumbling and rebellion continued to delay them, but despite their own lack of heart to carry out the bidding of the Lord, they won a military contest with the Amorites, so thoroughly routing them that they were able to settle in their land. Men were sent from thence to investigate the possibility of further moves, and another victory followed against King Og of Bashan.

Over a period of time, after the victorious skirmish with Og, the people took possession of the territory north and east of the Dead Sea, bringing them to the borders of Moab on the south and the Jordan River on the west. They were now situated along the Jordan River opposite Jericho. At this location in their journey, a most fascinating story finds its way into the Scriptures. It is the story of Balaam, a foreign prophet. While the story is a strange one, fraught with technical problems of interpretation and understanding, it is a story that has obviously been inserted arbitrarily at this point to contrast faith with unfaith. Like an unbranded cow — a maverick — Balaam wanders into the Scriptures bearing the authentic brand of the prophet who speaks God's truth. Despite the fact that the difficulties of the story are partially resolved, as a rule, by considering the story as a blend of two, it shall be treated (for the sake of narrative) as it appears,

calling attention where necessary to apparent contradictions.

The chapters surrounding this story are literally strewn with the dead of the unfaithful Israelites, who have refused to hear the voice of the Lord speaking to them. A congregation of the people had been aroused to mutiny in an immediately preceding episode. Korah challenged the right of Moses and Aaron in their capacity as leaders, and gathered a group of people around him who decided they would take matters into their own hands. When Moses and Korah came face to face for a showdown, the mutineers were literally swallowed up by the earth, and those who followed after Korah were consumed by fire. The very next day, however, the people were back at the same old soapbox, voicing their complaints against Moses, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord" (Num. 16:41). Of their number, fourteen thousand seven hundred perished as a result of a plague that fell among the people. Unfaith and distrust, throughout the entire pilgrimage, has resulted in death, and still the people have not heard the voice of God speaking to them, calling them to trust and obedience.

Much as the American Indian Chiefs staged contests to determine which had possession of stronger "medicine," a contest was staged between Aaron, chief of the priests, and representatives of the other tribes. A rod was taken from each of the tribes, Aaron's rod representing Levi, and they were placed in the tent of meeting. The following day, the rod of Aaron had sprouted and put forth buds, producing blossoms and bearing ripe almonds, a symbol of God's watchfulness over Israel. The remaining rods were just as they had been. Aaron's rod was to remain in the tent for all to see, as a sign to the rebels among the people that God had spoken through Moses and Aaron, and Israel had been called to obey.

Previous mention has been made of another uprising, which appears here, over the lack of water (see ch. VI). Time and again the people waved the flag of doubt, and rejected God's call. They consistently refused to accept the counsel of Moses and Aaron as being the chosen voice of God, and challenged it on every hand.

Each challenge had been answered by God in a way that was demonstrable in the lives of the people — his truth was pragmatic truth which they could clearly discern for themselves and their lives. When they trusted God's call, they were provided with those things necessary for the sustenance of their lives, and victory over their enemies. When they refused the truth, they reaped death. The writers of the exodus interpret the punishment as the finality of physical death — a complete separation from the living community.

In the midst of all this turmoil and distrust in the tents of Israel comes the strange story of Balaam, finding its way into the Scriptures at a point where its message stands out perfectly clear for all who are willing to accept the truth. Much like the books of Jonah and Ruth, the message cuts across the history of the times in which it falls. It does not concern activities within the community itself, but stands apart from the community and pronounces a judgment on the people who have been unwilling to hear God's word as a word which means the difference between their living and dying.

When Israel spread her tents across the plains of Moab, Balak, the king of Moab, reacted in alarm at this obvious threat from such a mass of people, whose victory over the Amorites had reached his ears. He quickly dispatched messengers, with the fees proper to the occasion, to acquire the services of Balaam, a prophet from another nation, requesting him to come proclaim a curse on Israel to assure her defeat. The people believed a curse carried in it the potential for fulfillment, and evidently Balaam's curses were of the very best quality, because Balak told his messengers to say to him, "For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed" (Num. 22:6).

When the messengers came to Balaam, offering him the divination fee for his services, they told him their king's words, and requested that he return with them. Now, whether Balaam had also heard of the victory of the Israelites over the Amorites and had been persuaded that their God was a powerful God in whom he would do well to believe, or whether his understanding of

God's relationship to Israel and to the world came from some other source, we are never told. In any event, this man, a pagan by the standards of the Israelites, one who stood outside the faith and the tents of the nation, said to the messengers, "Lodge here this night, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me" (Num. 22:8).

After making his situation known to God, he became convinced that Israel stood under God's special blessing as a people chosen by him for a special task, and he could not place a curse on them. He sent the messengers back to Balak with his refusal, only to receive shortly a more impressive company carrying Balak's promise of special favor if he would comply. Now, Balaam was not haggling over his fee, as Balak perhaps supposed. He was not concerned with the fee on this occasion, but with conformity to God's will, and those who have chastised Balaam through the centuries for his seeming commercialism have completely missed the point of his story. He told the men a second time that he could do only as the Lord commanded him, and as for additional honor or fees, he stated, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God, to do less or more" (Num. 22:18). The contrast of such a faith, following the previous chapters, is a little overpowering. Here was a man whose understanding had not come through channels—he had not seen the wonders God had performed in delivering the Israelites from Egypt—but he was able to accept the word of God as valid however it had reached him.

When God's word does not ring out from among his chosen people, he will raise up prophets to proclaim his word wherever he is able. This secular prophet was able to discern God's will for Israel when Israel herself had been unable to perceive it. When the church does not proclaim the truth, God will make his truth known in some other way. But wait—even clearer evidence is given in the story, and we are getting ahead of ourselves.

After asserting his integrity, Balaam asked the men to wait through the night anyway, that he might ascertain more surely

God's will. When he made his problem known to God this time, he understood that he was to go back with the men. "But only what I bid you, that shall you do," God said. (Num. 22:20.)

We here encounter a difficulty that finds no ready explanation in the account itself. Having saddled his ass, Balaam started off with the men, but God was angry with him because he went, and we have no information for the resolution of the conflict between the contradictory statements. Could it be that Balaam had yielded to temptation, and that through the night the thought of all that gold and silver he spoke of had overcome him so completely that he had decided he might be better off to pronounce a curse on Israel? Had he been tempted to elevate himself personally by doing Balak's dirty work? Or had he gone off half-cocked without clearly understanding the nature of his task, so that it was necessary for God to take steps to make very certain Balaam understood exactly the nature of the situation? We are not told the reason for the ensuing test of Balaam.

As he rode the ass, which was certainly capable enough of following the road they traveled, Balaam was surprised that she turned aside and wandered off into a field. She was not blind—the road was plainly visible to her, but so was an angel whom we read she saw standing with drawn sword blocking the way. Balaam struck the ass in anger to return her to the road; then, as they came onto a narrow pathway between vineyards which were walled off on either side, the angel stood again before the ass, in the center of the path, and as there was not sufficient room to go around the menacing sword blocking the way, the ass crowded so far to one side that Balaam's foot was pressed against the wall. This made Balaam absolutely furious, and he struck the ass again, no doubt mumbling to himself about her utter stupidity and blindness. A little farther on they arrived at a place so narrow that there was no room to pass the sword that again blocked the path, and the ass, seeing no way to go forward, simply lay down under Balaam. Further enraged, Balaam took his staff and beat the animal. Then we read that the Lord opened the mouth of the ass to speak.

In his anger, Balaam must surely have wondered what had happened to make his faithful old animal act so strangely, but past loyalty and service were momentarily forgotten in the heat of his anger, and he desired only to kill the ass, and probably would have done so had he but had a sword. Her behavior was certainly most strange—she had never acted so stupid before. “Am I not your ass,” she asked, “upon which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Was I ever accustomed to do so to you?” (Num. 22:30.) Balaam looked at the old animal, lying there in the roadway, and remembered all the years of faithful service rendered him—her patient and forgiving nature as she worked for him year after year, saving him much personal hardship. Her past performance made her present behavior almost inexplicable. What could ever have gotten into her? What had caused such unseemly behavior? Balaam looked again at the ass and was compelled to answer her question with a definite, “No” (Num. 22:30).

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed his head, and fell on his face. (Num. 22:31.)

Only then did he become aware that the apparent perversity of the ass had saved his life. He was told he would have been slain and the animal spared had he forced her to go on. The real purpose of the visitation was then explained, verifying somewhat our suspicion that Balaam had momentarily weakened in his resolve to obey God. Some part of Balaam had been withheld from God—the preservation of some old idol which afforded security to Balaam stood between him and God, rendering his service useless until he became totally dependent upon God’s word for his life. Balaam quickly assented to the judgment as a valid one, and accepting the truth about himself, he confessed that he had indeed sinned. Feeling that his sin—his distrust of God’s goodness—canceled his usefulness, he turned to go home, but was assured of his forgiveness and restoration by being told

to continue the journey. He was cautioned, however, that he was to speak only God's word when the time came.

Balaam hadn't attended Sunday school and church all his life, nor memorized the catechism dutifully, nor eventually grown up to become a respected officer in the church. His revelation had not come through regular channels, but in the midst of his life he was willing to perceive the truth about life. Not only was his revelation an occurrence outside the orthodox community; he had an openness toward all events which enabled him to hear the voice of God, no matter where it came from — even from the mouth of an ass! In his willingness to abide by God's will for his life, we are reminded of another outsider. In the New Testament, the story is told of a Roman soldier who came to Jesus seeking help for his devoted slave who lay at home paralyzed. When Jesus agreed, saying, "I will come and heal him" (Matt. 8:7), the soldier answered that he was not worthy of such a visit, and pleaded with Jesus to heal the servant simply by his word, which the man believed as authoritative. Jesus turned to his followers and said, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Matt. 8:10). This can certainly be said also of Balaam. In the entire story of the exodus, not one of such faith has been among those who followed Moses, with the possible exception of Joshua, Moses' young admirer.

When Balaam arrived at the city of Moab, he reaffirmed his inability to do or speak anything but what God commanded him, which should have prepared Balak for his subsequent disappointment. Balak built seven altars and sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams at the high place where Balaam could see a portion of the people spread out on the plains below. Now, all was in readiness. Balaam went apart to seek God's will, and God sent him back, having put the word in his mouth (the sign of the true prophet), and he spoke:

"From Aram Balak has brought me,  
the king of Moab from the eastern mountains:  
'Come, curse Jacob for me,  
and come, denounce Israel!'

How can I curse whom God has not cursed?  
How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced?  
For from the top of the mountains I see him,  
from the hills I behold him;  
lo, a people dwelling alone,  
and not reckoning itself among the nations!  
Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
or number the fourth part of Israel?  
Let me die the death of the righteous,  
and let my end be like his!"

(Num. 23:7-10.)

There, stretched before his eyes, were the people whom God had called out from the nations to be his own, a people whose security did not lie as a power among other nations, but who were called to depend on God for their life. Balak was horrified. "What have you done to me?" (Num. 23:11), he cried, and Balaam answered the only answer possible to one who knows God, saying in effect, "I can only speak the truth as I understand it." He spoke like Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, who in denying that truth lay in the Roman Catholic Church, said: "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

Twice more Balak made an attempt to restore the situation. He took Balaam to two additional places where he could see different portions of the Israelite camp, and asked again that Balaam curse them so that victory might fall into Balak's hands. Twice more Balak was disappointed, and in the third oracle Balaam revealed the substance of his own belief, which had sprung out of his own personal experience with God, when he confessed:

"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,  
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,  
the oracle of him who hears the words of God,  
who sees the vision of the Almighty,  
falling down, but having his eyes uncovered."  
(Num. 24:3-4.)

These were words spoken by one whose eyes had been closed and then opened in his own experience, when he had seen the

vision of the angel on the road, who called him from self-will to radical obedience to God. He had fallen down on his face on the road, and his eyes had been uncovered. We were never sure if he was planning to curse the Israelites, but his experience is certainly suggestive of that of Saul, who on the road to Damascus fell to the ground and had his eyes opened by a vision of the truth. God raised up Saul from outside the church, opening his eyes that he might in turn lead the people from darkness to light, and speak the word of God to those who would hear. He spoke to those of the Christian community who desired to make it a closed corporation, bearing the seal of Judaism. He stood in the midst of the early Christian community, willing to be responsible for the truth with his life. He was beaten, stoned, and left for dead, shipwrecked and adrift on a lonely sea, and almost constantly in danger from either the Gentiles or his own people.

Martin Luther, whose spirit has already been compared with Balaam's, was the Balaam of the sixteenth century, placing himself over against the orthodox community by his acceptance of the truth as he found it revealed in the Bible. He stood apart from the community and proclaimed the word God had intended that he proclaim, speaking God's judgment on those who set themselves above his way. God raises up his prophets wherever they are needed to speak his truth to those who will hear and believe.

Speaking to Balak about the chosen people, Balaam reaped his anger, yet he stood, willing to assume the responsibility for his own behavior as well as for God's purpose in Israel, in the fulfillment of which Balaam eventually lost his own life (Num. 31:8). He spoke in the face of Balak's displeasure and over against the distrust of the Israelites themselves, who, as far as we know, were unaware of the drama that played itself out on the heights above them. They did not know that a stranger had identified himself with them. He was willing to accept the burden of Israel's call, pronouncing disasters for all those who were enemies of Israel, the chosen ones of God. "Alas, who shall live when God does this?" (Num. 24:23), he asked, and we see all the

graves stretched out across the wilderness of those Israelites who died when they set themselves against the call of God to leave Egypt and the past behind and go forward to become a blessing to all nations.

Having spoken his word, Balaam returned home, and the voice of one who stood outside the tents of Israel, but who knew God and understood himself as one who could speak only God's truth, was silenced. Where is the voice of Balaam today — who speaks the truth God's people are unwilling to acknowledge and die for, to a creation that groans in travail? Is there a voice outside the disobedient community, proclaiming the victories that God has intended they should achieve? Where is the voice speaking the truth about man? Do we hear it speaking in the words of the French atheist, Jean-Paul Sartre, who says bad faith has its origin in those who demand the privileges of a free consciousness, but who seek refuge from the responsibilities of freedom by pretending to be helpless slaves to their past, when there is nothing to prevent their making a wholly new choice of the way of being? <sup>9</sup>

Do we hear the voice speaking in the sometimes almost unintelligible phrases of Samuel Beckett, the Irishman who seems to say in his play *Waiting for Godot* that in the waiting for life to begin (in heaven or wherever one expects to find it), life gets past us completely unobserved, and we don't know when it may be too late to stop waiting and start living?

Was it speaking to the world in the voice of the Dane, Søren Kierkegaard, who though he lived a hundred years ago is only now beginning to be heard — a voice that placed itself so vehemently outside the orthodox community that it urged all men to make their guilt less by ceasing to make God a fool and refusing to participate in public worship in church? <sup>10</sup>

Instead of a voice we can hear, does the truth assail us from the artist's canvas? Perhaps it comes from the twisted, tormented figures who cry in anguish from Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* — here we have a witness to the truth more lucid than we can endure to hear, which says you cannot live without love — death is the reward of lovelessness in the world. Or do the blank, melancholy

faces of Rouault's clowns reveal a truth we are unwilling to accept—that of our own disillusionment with life and the suppressed awareness of our joylessness? Will we hear Maurice Utrillo speak to our aloneness, our lack of community and communication with our fellow man, with his paintings of shapeless human figures always receding from us, leaving us in the objective isolation of the observer of life, life that seems everywhere to be just beyond our grasp?

Is the voice one that must now reach us from the past, that of Albert Camus, who has said in his chilling little book *The Stranger* that man cannot be a self until he has come into a responsible relationship to his fellow men, being neither a slave to their desires, nor as a god over them?

Or can we hear the voice from some field unrelated to literature or art, say psychology, where we hear the words of Erich Fromm, who says that modern man has idealized freedom, giving his life and, to a large measure, his security for it? But having freedom, he “has not gained freedom in the positive sense of the realization of his individual self; that is, the expression of his intellectual, emotional, and sensuous potentialities. Freedom, though it has brought him independence and rationality, has made him isolated and, thereby, anxious and powerless.”<sup>11</sup>

Has the voice come from the existential analysts, such as Ludwig Binswanger, who appear to be the only concerned individuals working with the sickness of the world who have had the courage to speak of “love” as the transforming element in the existence of the individual? In the break-through that comes into life when the “I” is pluralized into “we” through love, “existence is no longer a finite being-in-the-world, hurled from crag to crag (Hölderlin), but, regardless of this, is secured in the infinite fullness of homeland and eternity.”<sup>12</sup>

When the voice comes, will we open our eyes and unstop our ears that we may hear the truth that God has spoken to the world from the beginning? Or will we say that the prophet is a maverick, one who does not bear the brand of the flock—one who does not speak with the language it uses, and does not understand

the Word which it is keeping safe? And if the voice comes near to us with the truth that will sweep away our past, our captivity to the comfortable fleshpots of Egypt, our sacred isms, will we continue to insist, as the Judaistic Christian churches insisted, that the speaker bear our brand, our circumcision, our legalism, and our death? As Judah held the world at arms' length, unwilling to admit it to the understanding that had been placed in her keeping, except grudgingly if the world agreed to observe all the ancient customs and laws which she had elevated to the place of worship, do we not also place insurmountable obstacles to real life before a world that shakes its head in bewilderment at our petty arguments and meaningless trivia, our empty phrases and the too painfully evident lack of the spirit of love in our midst, as we zealously pledge the undying, prattling service of our lips?

After coming near to that community which calls itself the church, the people called out by God to speak the truth and be a blessing to the world, will the bearer of the voice turn sadly away, repeating the words of another who tried to speak truth to a weary, waiting world: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead"? (Matt. 8:22.)

## XII

### *Whatever Became of the Third Act?*

It was spring, and the gentle land lay green before the eyes of the people. The wild flowers sprawled in luxury across the fields. Harvesttime was at hand in the valley of the Jordan — a harvest brought by the touch of rain on the fields. The good, rich earth had been soaked by the melting snow from the Lebanons and the life-giving warmth of the sun. The Jordan River thirstily drank the melting snow and spring rain, and in its gluttony became swollen until it burst its banks and flowed over into the fields. Israel camped by the distended river, awaiting the moment when she would cross over it into the land that was to be the end of the long journey of promise from Egypt.

They had buried their tireless leader, Moses, on the hills behind them, but before he had died he had laid his hands on the one who was to lead them into the Promised Land. Joshua stood at the head of the people as they looked out over the Jordan. Moses' role in their deliverance had been like that of John the Baptist, who appeared in the wilderness, calling the people from captivity to their sin; and Joshua, which is to say Jesus, came to lead the people across the water to a new life.

The high clay bluffs beside the river even yet are frequently sent tumbling into the narrow river bed by earth shocks, damming the waters for as much as a day at a time. Whether or not this is the explanation for the passage of the people through the swift-running, flooded stream is not so important as the fact that they were at this time able to cross the river which ran its turbulent course between Israel and Canaan. Their crossing was no less a miracle, whatever its explanation.

The Ark of the Covenant was to be carried by the priests through the waters first, and the people were to follow at a respectful distance.

“And when the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be stopped from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.” (Josh. 3:13.)

The people crossed over the river bed with firm footing, and came at last to the place promised to their fathers. Life in the new land had begun. They had been delivered from bondage in Egypt to become God's people.

Now, it would be lovely if we could close the story of Israel's call and deliverance right here with the words, “And they lived happily ever after”! But being human beings, they didn't live happily ever after, and we find their story repeated again and again in the pages of the Bible.

The relationship of God and man in the Bible is the story of the exodus. God was the deliverer who had piled the waters in one place, making dry land for the feet of man at the creation, and man was delivered from nothingness. God was the deliverer of Israel across the sea, making them safe before the onslaught of the Egyptians bearing down close behind them. Israel, God's children, was delivered across the Jordan, and when she had settled in her new land, she rejected the role of God's people. She worshiped idols and looked for meaning in her life in some source other than God, and God, who tolerates no idols, appointed Babylonia as the instrument of his wrath, and once again Israel found itself captive in a foreign land. There God's call came again to those who would accept his deliverance, and a voice cried:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain."

(Isa. 40:3-4.)

God once again would make a path for Israel to walk on — a level path leading to life as his people.

Man was created in the image of God, however, and he has the freedom to trust that which is not God to bring meaning to his life. When Israel walked God's highway back to Jerusalem from Babylon, she chose once again to place herself in captivity by shaping her own life and seeking to establish her own righteousness by infusing meaning into her life with idolatrous worship of the law. She had always existed under a covenant of grace, but she would not accept God's righteousness as a gift. The law had been God's gift, of course, but given for the very purpose of showing man he could not worship himself and the work of his own hands.

So we find the story of the exodus repeated again in Mark:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Israel; with thee I am well pleased."

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. (Mark 1:9-13.)

So Jesus acted out the drama of the exodus of God's chosen. I have substituted "Israel" in the reference where the Revised Standard Version reads "Son." Mark does not here exactly quote any specific Old Testament Scripture, and may have been referring to one (or all) of several, e.g., Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1; Jer. 31:20, and perhaps even Gen. 22:2. His exact words most closely parallel

those in Isaiah, which read in the RSV, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him." The manuscript used by Mark for the reference would most surely have been the Septuagint, which is the Greek version translated from the Hebrew, which begins the same passage, "Israel, my elect, Jacob, my Son, whom I uphold." The words "Israel," "Son," "Jacob," "chosen," "elect" are all used interchangeably for the chosen through whom God works in the world. To Mark, then, Jesus, the Son, the chosen, the beloved, was the new Israel. He was baptized in the waters, as Paul says of ancient Israel: "Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (I Cor. 10:1-2), and when they had come up out of the waters they were in the wilderness forty years, tested and fed by food from heaven, before their deliverance was complete. When Jesus' testing in the wilderness was over, he called the Twelve, one for each of the twelve tribes, and went up to the mountain. Jesus and the disciples were the New Israel. Matthew adds an interesting side light to the story of Jesus with the flight of Joseph, Mary, and their newborn child to Egypt to escape the death decree by Herod, in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matt. 2:15).

Repeatedly God called man to become his children, and man has fallen away again and again. God has made himself known to man, Paul tells us, and man is "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20) in his self-willed alienation from God's presence. But man's only salvation revealed in the Bible is the everlasting love of God, which accepts man as he is and stands at the door waiting for man to open the door on the life that is God's gift to all who will receive.

Paul declares that man has known ever since the creation who God was not—he was not visible, he was not temporal, he was not mortal and therefore corruptible. (Rom. 1:20.) Yet man continues to worship that which is visible, temporal, and corruptible. Man has placed trust for meaning in his life in those things he

could see and manage. Having chosen, he is responsible for his choice and his own destiny — he is given up by God to the pursuit of his free choice. What could be known about God has always been plain to him, but the call to exodus — to new life — was lost in Israel's claim to exist in her own right. She refused to understand that she could not secure her own life, and did not trust that her life had been given to her by a loving God. She rejected the knowledge of who God is, and at the same time, who she is.

Salvation has always been God's gift intended for his people — and it has been made manifest in the everlasting possibility of exodus for man from the old to the new — the past to the present. In the Christ, once again God's message of salvation is made manifest, and once again God tries to reconcile man to himself. God is eternally reconciled, and his eternal desire is that we be eternally reconciled to him, and thereby to ourselves and our brother. The Word was manifested in the flesh, as it had been manifested before in the Creation and in Israel's history. Man's salvation was prepared for him at "the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

The claim of God in Christ is the claim that has always been made on man as he confronts his fellow man — he must understand himself as one who has been given existence, which will become authentic life only when he is willing to trust God to provide justification and meaning for that life. He will then become free from searching the world for meaning in his life. He will know that no claim that the world places on him will, if accepted, give him life. When he has come to this understanding of himself, he will become free to serve his brother, free from anxiety about the future, free from bondage to the hurts and grudges of the past, and free from the desire to return to the past as a way to security.

His freedom thrusts upon him the responsibility for his life — a life that must, under God, turn to service and love of others — and man thereby becomes responsible for a world that he did not create. Israel, made up of God's called-out ones, is responsible,

under God, for a culture she did not make, and the sin of the world must speak to her of her own lack of trust. She must repent, not only for herself, but for her community, and turn to face the future without guile, without attempting to manipulate it to benefit her own comfort or prestige. When Jesus first saw Nathanael, according to the Gospel of John, he said of him, "Behold, an *Israelite* indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47, italics mine). Could he anywhere today find a man about whom he would be able to say, "Behold, a *Christian* indeed, in whom is no guile"?

When Moses was with Israel in the wilderness, at each sign of unfaith and rebellion in the camp he had fallen down on his face before God, pleading forgiveness for the people. They were not willing to repent, but Moses accepted the responsibility for a people he did not create. He was willing to pay for the distrust of the people with his own life. He did not seek an easy out from living in the world, but taking the distrust of his world upon himself he gave his life in service to it, even as Jesus of Nazareth gave his life for the world, trusting God even on the cross to meet him with fulfillment. There was nothing "magic" in the death of Jesus of Nazareth, and when we try to make it a magic event we rob Jesus of the role of one who trusted God all the way, without having at his disposal any means to stand apart from the death he died and regard it as the prelude to his own glorification. The resurrection in Christ is the new life which is resurrected in all men who are willing to trust God to put to death a self that would put itself first. All of life must be given over into his hands, denying the necessity of worldly justification or glory. The resurrected life turns to open the door to the brother in need, who does not have God's abiding love in him. Amidst all the faithlessness of his brothers, Moses stood steadfast in the call of God to a new life. The meaning of John's words were part of Moses own life: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (I John 3:14).

The old reality had passed way for Israel. They were forever removed from all things that they had known as a way of life.

Familiar forms and ideas, thoughts, patterns, traditions, history, perspective, and anticipation — none of these would ever be the same again. A *new* reality had come into being. Perhaps in the strangeness of her new life, Israel felt that if she closed her eyes for one short second her changed life might disappear altogether, and so she clung to what she believed was a stable reality — her past. But God had called her away from her past, and again and again throughout her history she is called to walk the road of faith in exodus — to become God's delivered from captivity. Terrified of the consequences of the freedom God offers, the responsibility of growing into a maturity of service to fellow man, she tried to climb back into the earlier years, as the psychologist tells us a child desires to crawl back into the security of the womb.

We of the contemporary church, like Israel of old, regard the future as death in disguise. But God has called us to exodus — to heed the old commandment he has given: "Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard" (I John 2:7). We can cling to our own worldly pursuit of security as being capable of giving life only by closing our ears to the words of Jesus in the New Testament. We, like the Pharisees, have made our phylacteries broad and our fringes long, our stained-glass windows impressively tall and opiate beautiful, our pews deep and softly cushioned, and our aisles luxuriously carpeted.

Christian Israel must cease to be turned in upon itself, shut off from the needs of the world. The veil that hid the Holy of Holies in the Temple from the rest of the world must again be torn asunder, and the gift of God's love and acceptance of all men everywhere must be carried to the world by a community willing to be his people. We must become willing to forgo self-will, and at the sacrifice of our own comfortable, secure life become brothers to a world that suffers from the agonies of the lost. The lost sheep must become more important than the safe flock in the sheepfold — and the storms of political strife, eco-

conomic selfishness, and national greed must not deter the shepherd from leaving the sheepfold to call the lost sheep into the fold of God's love.

This may mean that the church must lose its life and completely abandon the form of life it now assumes, and find a different form which can lead the exodus in the world in which it finds itself. The door of the community must be opened to all who would hear God's call, and that call must be one relevant to contemporary life. Self-centered pride of class, race, and nation must die that new life may be born. Building and programs may have to be razed, indoctrination and education radically reformed—the old wineskins filled with dead tradition cannot be patched to carry the new wine of deliverance to a world that is no longer the old world, but which is so desperately in need of deliverance.

We stand at a crossroad scarcely paralleled in Western culture, and we must choose which path we will take. If we choose to follow Moses across the sea to exodus, we have God's promise that we will be his people and that he will abide with us to the end of the age. If we choose our own way, back across the sea to the comfortable fleshpots of Egypt, we cannot help but reap the results of our own uselessness to God as did Israel of old.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" the voice of truth speaks in our ear, "because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves." (Matt. 23:13-15.)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (Matt. 23:27-28.)

If we are to follow the call of God to exodus, opening the way for the world to be drawn to God, we must be willing to give ourselves to the world. Because of the love we have received from God, we have become obligated to love. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (I John 4:11.) But we cannot know how to love the world if we do not first face it and see it for what it is. We must in every way set ourselves the task of understanding the world—for we, like Israel of old, find ourselves in an entirely new world, unlike any we have ever known before. We cannot escape being in this world, any more than Israel was able to go back to the old familiar world of Egypt which it knew. We are here, and it is here that God has called us to love and be his communal servant to minister to the needs of the world.

It is a strange world we must get to know. While we have been hiding in our comfortable buildings, pretending that nothing has been going on "out there" these several hundred years, much has been going on out there, and when life out there is measured by the dogmas that the church says are the words of life, we must recognize that the world has gone off and left us standing somewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century. The school books and storybooks we grew up with have become obsolete—the Bible story lessons of our childhood, left in the context of ancient history and unrelated to life, which are practically the only direct contact we have allowed ourselves with the Bible, make no sense in the world as it has become. We can no longer play-pretend that our old ways and old phrases can work magic in a world cluttered with cubist art, abstract sculpture, hydrogen energy, and a physical concept of the universe that has undergone radical changes during the past hundred years.

The life we look at around us is sometimes most accurately mirrored in the serious drama that comes to us from our most secular medium: television. Someone is always complaining of it: "They surely aren't going to end that play there! That's just the end of the second act—why don't they ever finish the play?"

Whatever happened to the third act? " Life in our contemporary world is just like that — we live in a world with only two acts. What do you suppose ever did become of the third act?

Everything about us seems to point to the inconclusiveness of life — art, music, literature, science, drama. Everything in life seems to come to an abrupt halt at the end of the second act. Life runs around in the circle of extemporaneous improvisation, like modern jazz, and there isn't any use waiting for the conclusive climax of the *1812 Overture* — it is never coming.

Generally we are appalled and repelled by modern art, which appears meaningless and depressing to us. The artist has refused to give us something to look at and identify — he has refused to put a focal point in his paintings — he has scattered the broken pieces of his subject about on the canvas in what must certainly be his own eccentric whim. All things are broken into equal portions. As a result, no one object is treated with any more emphasis than any other, and all objects assume the position of resting on an equal plane. No one element is valued above another.

To the tradition-ridden Western mind, schooled to distinguish objects as important or unimportant on a kind of sliding scale of values, this utter equality is regarded as sheer nonsense. The broken boards of a back door stoop are treated with as much care and detail as the face of the Madonna. The ordinary objects on a scratched kitchen table are treated with a loving attention earlier accorded the face of a nobleman.

The painter has nearly ceased to regard particular objects or people as beautiful or ugly. All objects and people are considered potentially beautiful and valuable — there has been a complete recasting of the value structure. A chair can be considered a landscape as inexhaustible as the ocean or the mountains, but the familiarity of the daily scene and objects has long obscured their beauty from us. Finally, in purely abstract art, even the distinction between "subject" and "nonsubject" is abolished, and the depiction of objects, live or otherwise, gives way to mere patches of color, made subtly alive by light and shadow.

Man has ceased to have an identity in modern art forms. He is cut in pieces and strewn about the canvas, his members dis-severed, his face indiscernible. There has all but ceased to be an artistic "image of man." No trend is in evidence to reassemble the parts of man into a recognizable whole.

In literature, too, man has ceased to have identity — he is faceless and nameless, everybody and nobody. The reader is left to his own devices to grapple with the characters in Camus, Kafka, and Joyce. As early as Tolstoy, we find the image beginning to disappear. Pierre, in *War and Peace*, wanders through Russian history, searching for himself. He changes his manner and goals almost as many times as he makes his appearance. He constantly seeks someone to emulate because he does not know who he is and feels himself to be nobody. He switches from imitating the gambling, drunken cad to play-pretending he is the Mason, pure, altruistic, full of will power and self-control. And it is only when he is pushed up against the extremity, life as a prisoner of Napoleon in the ghastly frozen march back to France, that he really discovers who he is.

In either James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, one might come in at any place and go through the end, circling back to the beginning and reading to one's original starting place, without ever noticing the difference. One place is as we would like to suppose, that the writers are writing trash backward without detecting much difference. Like an abstract painting there seems to be no necessary top or bottom. It is not, as we would like to suppose, that the writers are writing trash or nonsensical jargon — they are writing about life as it appears to them in the middle of the great twentieth century — a round of meaningless trivia from which there is no escape and in which there is no hope.

Zhivago, the literary creation of Boris Pasternak, never really discovered who he was. Shuffled from one place to another by the forces of revolution that swept through his country, he never did come to know that the revolution was fought by a society that knew it must rid itself of such as he — the parasites of so-

ciety, the idealists who spoke in mushy phrases about "the people," but who, when they finally met them, thought they were horrible. He escaped into the rounded, white, loving arms of "Mother Russia," who appears in the novel as Lara, and who, of course, deserts him completely at the end. Throughout his life he yearned only for the good old days when it was not necessary for him to worry with the practical elements of life — he had had his wife to do that for him then.

Dostoevsky's works tell the same story as Picasso's *Guernica*, which we have mentioned earlier — freedom, when grasped by man in self-will, enslaves man to the tyranny of self, and he reaps the inevitable consequences — self-destruction and chaos.

The writers and artists of today's world are not being arbitrarily obscure — they play an entirely different role from that of their predecessors, whom contemporary man regards as "traditional." In a world whose value structure has collapsed, where men have become uncertain as to the nature of the true and the good, and where empty semantic phrases contain no magic to bring meaning into life, the modern artist or writer finds himself in a position far different from his artistic forebears.

The medieval painter, to take a specific example, worked in a world perfectly secure in the belief that it knew that which was true and good, and that which was evil. The artist of the medieval world, therefore, having at his disposal a blueprint of right and wrong, could comment on his society by his painting, measuring it against the prevailing standards, appraising its imperfections and approving its conformations.

Today, with no fixed standards, no single voice of government, and multiple voices claiming the right to the title of the "one true church," the artist does not measure by an accepted dogma. He describes the life situation as he observes and experiences it. He is not so much a gauge of society as a mirror. He reflects his experience of culture, the confusion of values, the diverse aims, and the general rootlessness of life, and someone else must reassert an old set of values or create a new set from the given description.

It is as if the painters and writers are waiting . . . waiting . . . for man to decide whom he will become. They are waiting for someone to write the third act. The breathless moment in the Garden of Eden, immediately prior to the choice by Everyman (Adam), hangs suspended throughout modern art forms. Until the choice is made between the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life, determining the image man will choose for himself, man's fate hangs in the balance. The possibilities of his "becoming" are endless, but he must choose.

In a world whose basic structure has changed from a foundation of material substance to one composed of nothing more substantial than energy, man finds himself in the bewildering state of being surrounded by elusive energy rather than what he has always regarded as solid matter. The implications of this discovery have not yet penetrated our so-called common sense. We still speak and act as substantialists. Science has had to discard every feature of thinking identified with "common sense" knowledge. Nothing is left in the field of physical science to remind one of the old way of expressing the composition of the world about us. Even empty space is gone—the whole spatial universe is a field of force, a realm of incessant activity.

You and I, however, comfortable in our velvet pews, continue to think and speak in the old material terms. Our laws, our society, our educational systems, are predicated on the proposition that a basic substance of ongoing nature is at the heart of the universe, and the dynamic of God's revelation in the exodus—always becoming—we have tried to imprison in a static form. Yesterday's scientific presuppositions still dominate our daily living, though they are now obsolete and invalid and have rendered all our old ways of living invalid.

The late Alfred North Whitehead said that modern physics has been reduced to a sort of mystic chant over an unintelligible universe. Our senses do not reveal to us the true nature of things, yet practically every popular philosophy, theology, and religion of our tradition is based squarely on sensual evidence. To incorporate modern scientific discoveries into our everyday living

does, in large measure, necessitate rethinking, reshaping, and revising all our old ideas and forms. We are people trying desperately to live in two worlds, and torn asunder by the impossibility. We feel the very ground slipping away under us, and cling the harder to the past to secure our tenuous footing, denying God's call to repent and make the exodus into life.

We are unable to escape the truth, however. It catches up with us on every hand. We glimpse what modern theologians have termed variously "nothingness" and the "abyss," and we draw away from reality in an effort to escape the experience of it. Space and matter have been swept away, and activity has been substituted — an activity that has lost the quality of the self-contained existence of isolated matter. We find our universe to be a complex state of interrelated activity, and suspended on the brink of a third act which it seeks but cannot find.

The world as it encompasses us in its reality, and as it is expressed in modern art forms, is revelatory. God speaks to us in the insecurity and complexity, and seeks to reveal to us something about ourselves previously unknown or unnoticed — something of the nature of man not recognizable on the surface. Perhaps the fact that we are not willing, more yet, that we are afraid to admit the truth revealed to us, is the reason we so often are reduced to sullenness and antagonism when confronted with a painting or a book that we profess to be completely unable to comprehend.

We abhor the strident, discordant music flowing from the pen of modern composers which reflects the ambiguities, the harshness, the desperate lack of resolution in our lives, which reaches and reaches for meaning, fulfillment, a third act, only to return to the drifting, floating, suspended themes which seem to color so much modern music, particularly jazz forms based on the improvisation of the moment.

The bulbous forms of the sculptor obliterate the spiritual elements of man's life, or his formations of twisted, tormented wire make man a mere nothing against a vast, inscrutable background.

All the arts cry out to us, all of life cries out to us, disclosing something of the truth about ourselves and our relationship to God and fellow man. We may continue to ignore the message and ridicule the messenger. We are at liberty to turn away from the truth that seeks to confront us on every hand, clinging to the familiarity of the past. Slavish affirmation of the past per se and its standards is not the way to exodus—not the way to life for men who would fain call themselves free.

Whether or not we are willing to accept the situation in our world today, the old has passed completely away, and we are, as always, being called by God to the new life in the land he has promised if we but trust him and not ourselves. The spirit of truth seeks that we should all know the truth. God is the spirit of truth and has sifted the world, judging it in its failure to meet and accept the truth as life-giving. If we will prove that we are his own, we will hear his voice and follow him, gathering together all others who will follow also. His word, as it came through Jesus Christ, will never leave us in peace until we have turned our back on Egypt and set our faces toward the wilderness of the future—the exodus—life's third act.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.” (Matt. 23:37-38.)

Where will the exodus take us? The exodus will take us into freedom and life. Life beats on the door, claiming us—and will not let us rest until we answer the claim it makes, or still it. Because we have been brought into existence, we must face the claim God makes on us for life. The claim of life is an offense, jarring us, threatening us, giving us no peace. We must repent of our past, which will be redeemed by God, for we cannot bring our pasts with us into the life that is awaiting our arrival. We cannot escape into reliance on timeless general truths—the only truth we can know is that which becomes a possibility for our

understanding ourselves, a possibility open to us in the word of God as it is addressed to us. When we will hear his word, then redemption—the new possibility of life—is God's gift, and we will be open to every fresh claim in our lives to be men who trust God, the one who comes to meet us in whatever life brings. The task we receive as redeemed people is to be a nonworldly community within the world, a constant offense to a world that worships idols. When we call the world to give up its idols and depend on God alone for meaning in life, we will certainly come under what Martin Luther has called the fourth dimension of the church—persecution—but we must, whatever comes, offer the world the possibility of resurrected life. We must hear the words of Joshua and decide:

“Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve.” (Josh. 24:14-15.)

## Notes

1. For further information and evidence, see *Krupp Trial*, U. S. Military Tribunal III, Case No. 10, Judgment July 31, 1948, *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals, October 1946–April 1949*, Drexel A. Sprecher and John H. E. Fried, Editors. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, Vol. IX, 1950, pp. 1409–1410.

2. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (The Modern Library, Random House, Inc.), Book V, Ch. V.

3. Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach."

4. Roger Lincoln Shinn, *Life, Death, and Destiny* (The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 39.

5. Ray Bradbury, *Dandelion Wine* (Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957), pp. 81–82. Used by permission of Harold Matson Company.

6. Of the 135 chapters included in the books of the law — Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy — some 80 of these are concerned directly with the exposition of the ethical and ceremonial law. Many others are simply exhortations to the people to observe the law. Most of this, we can learn from commentaries, actually was the product of the priestly minds during Israel's exile to Babylon and the postexilic period, which does not alter the fact that it is included at this point in the Old Testament.

7. From *The Third Strike*, by Jerry Gray. Copyright, 1949, by Pierce & Smith. Used by permission of Abingdon Press.

8. Sören Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom* (Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 34–35.

9. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (Philosophical Library, Inc., 1956).

10. Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
11. Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1941), p. viii.
12. Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger, editors, *Existence* (Basic Books, Inc., 1958), p. 312.

























(Continued from front flap)

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## THE AUTHOR

Dorothy M. Slusser, a native of Wichita, Kansas, attended four universities, received training in aviation in Tucson, Arizona, and taught Celestial, Dead Reckoning, and Radio Navigation for Braniff International Airways. In the classroom she met her husband, who was one of her students, though, as she says, "he knew a great deal more about navigation than I shall ever know." She and her husband, who is now Assistant Professor in the School of Religious Education at Hartford Seminary Foundation, Hartford, Connecticut, have two young "hyperactive" sons. Mrs. Slusser is the author of *Bible Stories Retold for Adults* (see back of jacket).

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